BEM

NME

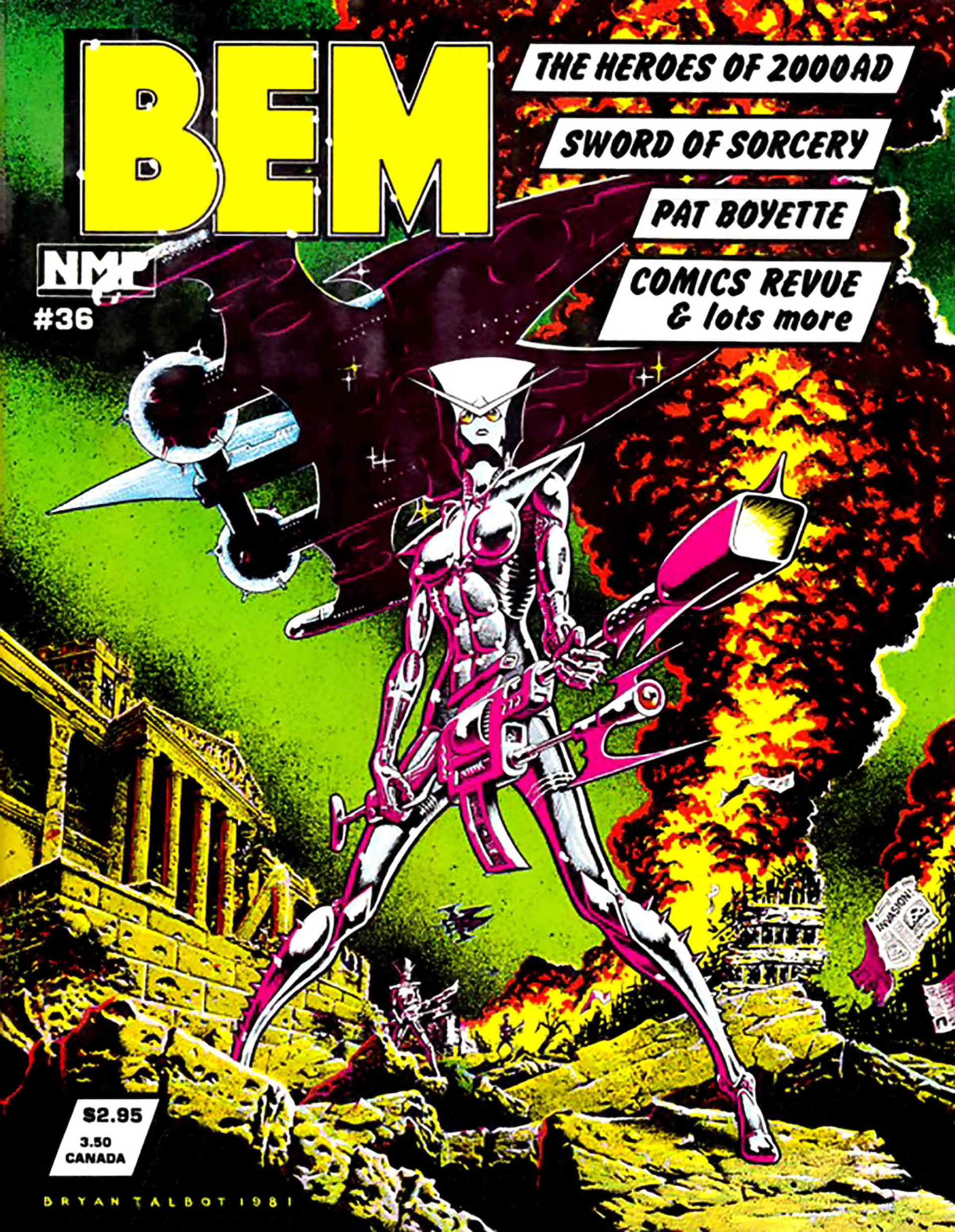
#36

THE HEROES OF 2000AD

SWORD OF SORCERY

PAT BOYETTE

COMICS REVUE
& lots more



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BEM Number 36

22- REACTION
Letters of comment from Margaret O'Connell, David Gryc, Graeme Bassett, Theo Clarke, John Dalzell, Lew Stringer, Dick Domar, Tom Beament, David Hunter, Geoff McLaurin, Richard Starkings, and Frank Plowright.

5- **THE HEROES OF 2000AD** ...by FRANK PLOWRIGHT
The life and times of Britain's award-winning weekly science fiction comic, with details of every series that's run in it so far.

17- "COLD CURE" ...written & drawn by PAUL ALEXANDER
An H.M.S. Conqueror adventure -- complete in this issue!

43- IN THE SHORT RUN: SWORD OF SORCERY ...by JOHN HAY
The story of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser's adventures as published by DC in the early seventies, in the first instalment of a new Bem series.

35- AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR RANSON ...conducted by LUKE RAINFORD
An insight into the work of one of Britain's top professional artists.

47- THE VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE ...by HOWARD LEROY DAVIS
An interview with Pat Boyette and Fred Himes.

38- MADE IN BRITAIN: ROGUE TROOPER ...by Ruan LANIHORNE
Introducing one of 2000AD's most popular current strips.

49- REVIEW SECTION

2000AD ANNUAL 1983	reviewed by Ruan Lanihorne
THE MARVEL COMICS ART OF WALLY WOOD	reviewed by John Hay
LOVE AND ROCKETS #1	reviewed by Christine Padgett
THE FIRST KINGDOM #16	reviewed by John Hay
JUDGE DREDD ANNUAL 1983	reviewed by Ruan Lanihorne
WEIRD WAR TALES #116	reviewed by John Hay
WARLORD SUMMER SPECIAL	reviewed by Ruan Lanihorne
DOCTOR WHO ANNUAL 1983	reviewed by Graeme Bassett
THE SAGA OF SWAMP THING #7	reviewed by John Hay
THE NEW TEEN TITANS ANNUAL #1	reviewed by Christine Padgett
WARRIOR #5	reviewed by Ruan Lanihorne
THE REIVERS	reviewed by Kathleen Glancy
SHORT SUBJECTS	comments by Keith Williams

54- THE IMAGO ...by B.J. MARTIN

55- KATHOLICITY ...by KATHLEEN GLANCY
From Britain's most popular fanzine columnist, a "Judge Dredd Primer" to tell you all you need to know about 2000AD's star attraction.

57- FAN-THINGS ...conducted by ED SALLIS
Bem's regular column of fan news and fanzine reviews, covering some of the best fanzines from Britain and Europe.

59- DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A CLAREMONT WOMAN? ...by MARGARET O'CONNELL
A short quiz for all would-be Jean Greys, Kitty Prydes, and Miradas in our audience -- could you be the superheroine star of the eighties?

60- "LADIES' NIGHT"
The first episode of a new three-part H.M.S. Conqueror serial, written by Martin Lock and drawn by Dave Harwood. The planet they'd landed on seemed friendly enough -- but there was a surprise in store!

29- SHANNA OF THE JUNGLE ...narrated by JAY LONGSTAFF
Shanna the She-Devil's shadowy past, from her debut in her own comic a decade ago up to the start of Ka-Zar's latest series, revealed!

67- ROBOT FACTORY ...written & drawn by MARK CASTO

Frontispiece by Don Wazejewski

For full art credits, see page 66

HAL SCHUSTER publisher — **MARTIN LOCK** editor

JACK SCHUSTER president — **JOHN HAY** assistant editor

ROBERT LEWIS executive editor — **CHRIS PADGETT** preafrooder

cover by Bryan Talbot

intro...

As mentioned in Bem-35, which was the first NMP-published issue, Bem is put together in Britain, and the pages are sent across to America for printing and publishing.

There were a few problems last time, due to the move of New Media's offices from Massachusetts to Florida and some minor "bugs" in the system, and they're not licked yet I'm afraid. The American comics news service for Bem-35 became so out of date that it was removed, to be replaced by a couple of house ads; similarly, while news coverage was put together for this issue, and was bang up to date at the end of August, after the jinx struck again I decided to take it out and replace it with an expanded letters column. Originally, we only had one letter from America, perhaps due to the change of American address, but the delay has given time for Bem's British readers to come to our rescue. I hope that we do get more letters from America this time, as a lack of response makes it difficult to know how Bem should be progressing.

The late appearance of last issue has brought its own problems, as much of the normal material for a new Bem comes in response to the last one; however, Bem's regulars have rallied round, and we've got a full and varied issue here, with British and American interviews, articles on both DC and Marvel heroes, almost all the regular Bem columns, and as our main attraction a history of all the series 2000AD has ever published, by Frank Plowright, illustrated with a wide selection of cover reproductions kindly supplied by Steve McManus.

Having two strips in our HMS Conqueror series helps us to "catch up" on the months lost. "Cold Cure" is a special strip written & drawn by Paul Alexander in response to an announcement in Bem

continued on page 66...

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THIS MAN HAS SOMETHING TO SELL YOU

Judge Dredd is (c) 1980 by I.P.C. Magazines Ltd. This picture, by Brian Bolland, comes from the cover of BEM issue 23.

He is Judge Dredd, and he is the star of the weekly British sf comic 2000AD; this striking picture of him was drawn by Brian Bolland for Bem, one of New Media's line of regular fanzines.

Bem has won the Eagle Award for favourite British fanzine, and is now being published in America by New Media so that everyone can join in. Gary Ricker in The Comic Reader said "Bem has been a favorite since this column first appeared: the writing is often thoughtful, sometimes delightfully cheeky... I'd enjoy having a couple beers with these people; that is about as close as I can come to four stars."

Bem deals with American, British and European comics, with a wide range of contributors to match; so join us, and besides articles and commentary on American favourites you'll find out about the British scene, read interviews with top professionals...and, we hope, have a good time.

The best way to get Bem is to subscribe -- so fill in the coupon, and join in the fun!

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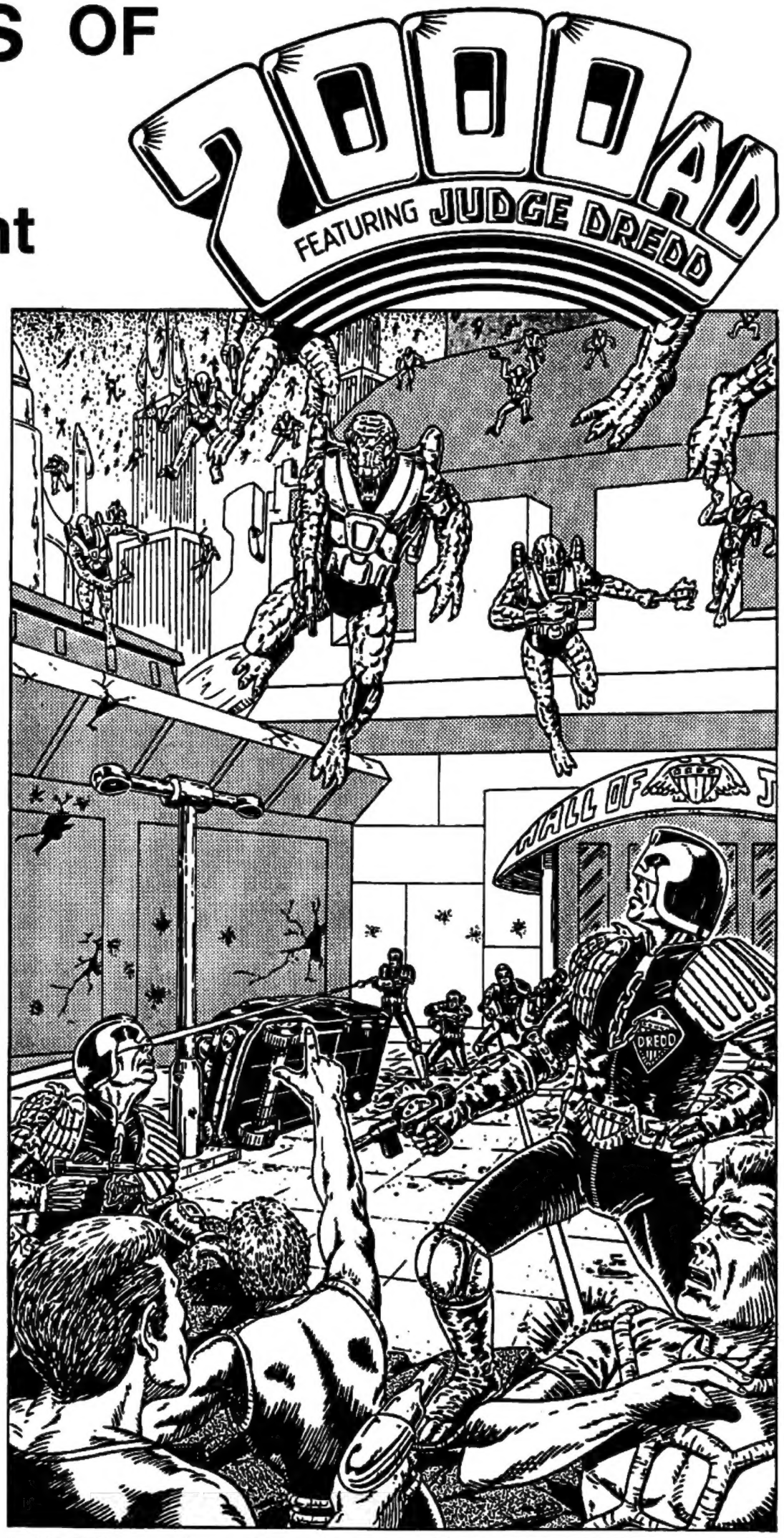
THE HEROES OF 2000AD

by Frank Plowright



A scene from the Judge Dredd story in 2000AD prog 94, re-interpreted for Bem by Dave Harwood.

At the end of February 1977, the punk music revolution was just getting under way in Great Britain. And just as all of Britain's current top music acts were spawned from punk or post-punk beginnings, so was the British comics system altered by the arrival that month of a comic that was to break new ground, and is now indisputably Britain's top comic: 2000AD.

British comic fandom's Eagle Awards for 1976 had divided the placings in the British section among a diverse selection of comics related material. Newspaper strips, the atrocious Captain Britain, and Britain's only alternative comic, House of Hammer, all figured prominently that year. But the awards for 1977 and 1978 saw 2000AD and its personnel gaining a larger share of the awards, and over the past two years the comic has dominated the British part of the listings. 2000AD has become the first British comic to be taken seriously, and to be seen as collectable by comic fandom.

The fact was that British comics have always been designed for and aimed at children, and young children at that. The insular thinking was that there was no other audience for them, despite the presence of comic strips in newspapers and the fact that all over continental Europe comics are produced for adult consumption, to say nothing of the substantial adult and collegiate comic fandom in the USA.

2000AD Prog 1 (programme 1, as in a computer programme) appeared cover-dated 26th February 1977, and even though the "free gift" of a plastic "space spinner" was better than the usual rubbish, the comic didn't seem to be too different from most others at first glance.

The differences were there, though, when one looked. All but one of the strips were the first episodes of continued stories, and six pages long (both almost unprecedented in the weekly British comics), and there were no humour strips. There had been longer strips before, but never more than one to a comic. The extra pages per story meant that the comic didn't have the cramped look of other British comics, which had a multitude of panels to fit into two or three pages in order to tell the story, and it allowed room for a splash page to be used to introduce the story, an idea borrowed from American mainstream comics. Also interesting was that there was a hint of editorial humour, not only in the omnipotent Betelguesean host Tharg, who wouldn't be developed until later, but also in the fact that as well as the usual Commonwealth prices on the cover, there was a price of 17 galactic groats for Mercury. Later, prices for Venus, Mars, the Asteroid Belt, Neptune, Saturn and Pluto were added. As the price of the comic has risen here on Earth, there has been a decrease on most other planets, most drastically on Pluto, from 93g to 52g; but we can spare a thought for the inhabitants of Venus, where the price has increased ninefold from 10g to the current 99g.

Another innovation that 2000AD has introduced to the British comics scene has been the adoption of full credits for the writer, artist and letterer, even if they are listed as robots. The reason why there is

no inking credit is that most artists do their own inking. Later issues have also included a voting form for the readers to vote for their favourite strip in that particular issue. The results are then tabulated in graph form, and give a good indication of the popularity of each particular character or storyline. Judge Dredd has topped every poll since about his tenth appearance, but the popularity of most strips usually depends on which other features appear in that issue.

2000AD was put together by Pat Mills, who with John Wagner's help created the basics of all the strips in the first issue, and scripted them all himself. Both had worked previously on BATTLE and ACTION, also produced by IPC. They had both been successful, and Mills was seen as the man to start a new science fiction adventure comic.

Mills and Wagner have both stayed with the comic, although Mills relinquished his editorial position to return to freelance writing. From the beginning, a very high percentage of the writing on 2000AD has been handled by seven people: Mills, Wagner and his various pseudonyms ("They are just for fun. The tendency to treat comics seriously must be avoided at all costs"), Gerry Finley-Day, Jack Adrian, Tom Tully, Alan Hebden, and more recently Alan Grant. Tully and Hebden are both long-time comics writers, as is Finley-Day, who edited the girls' comic MANDY at one time. Jack Adrian is the alias of science fiction writer Chris Lowder, and Alan Grant is 2000AD's former sub-editor.

Artistically, 2000AD has changed considerably over the years. It broke new ground right from the start by not insisting on a house style, but few British artists worked on the comic. Only Dave Gibbons, Ian Gibson and Mike McMahon were both available and good enough, so a large amount of work was shipped out to various Spanish artists who, while competent, were dead boring. Thankfully that situation has now changed to the point where the highly distinctive and talented styles of Carlos Ezquerra (who lived in Britain until last year) and the Italian Massimo Belardinelli are the only foreign artists regularly seen in 2000AD. In the meantime talents such as Brendan McCarthy, Brian Bolland, Steve Dillon, Brett Ewins, Garry Leach, and Kevin O'Neill have emerged to do their first regular work for 2000AD, and the comic has attracted people like Ron Smith, a longtime D.C. Thomson artist, who's produced his best work on the Judge Dredd strip, leaving the future very bright on the art side.

What follows is a look at the various strips that have appeared in 2000AD since its inception, in order of appearance.

INVASION (PROGS 1-51)

This was the strip that started the comic off and, along with M.A.C.H. ONE, it was the strip that would have fitted most easily into any IPC adventure comic. Britain, along with the rest of Europe, was invaded and oppressed in 1999 by the Volgan forces of Eastern Europe. Bill Savage, a long distance truck driver, returned home to find his family murdered. He begins a one-man war against the Volgans, before teeming with Peter Silk, and eventually forming a small squad of faceless resistance fighters. Scripted by Gerry Finley-Day, and drawn by a variety of artists in the most perfunctory way, the series was never exceptionally good, but must have been popular enough with the readership to last for a year. Perhaps the readers liked the inventive and violent ways in which Savage disposed of the Volgs: running them over with a bulldozer on a newly tarred road, strafing them with a jet plane, and even driving a tank onto their dinner table and blowing it up. The whole time, Savage was rendered with a maniacal stare on his face.

Most episodes were one-parters, but, towards the end, a thread of continuity was introduced, with Savage's attempts to see Prince John, heir to the throne, to safety in Canada. The series ended with Savage accompanying the Prince, and the USA mobilising their forces in order to strike back. Bill Savage returned in Prog 119, in DISASTER 1990, chronologically set before this series.

FLESH (1-19)

By the 23rd century, nearly all wildlife on Earth had been wiped out, and mankind lived on synthetic food. However, the discovery of the means to travel through time meant that the Trans Time Corporation could set up bases in Earth's far past to capture and herd dinosaurs, kill them, and transmit the meat back to the 23rd century. The processing plant in this series was located in the Cretacious period (the plant in the sequel serial, Flesh Book 2, was in the Triassic), and it was run by Earl Reagan, portrayed as a pre-historic cowboy. As if his job was not difficult enough, he had to deal with Claw Carver (so known because of the claw he wore to replace his missing right hand), who was attempting to steal the gold kept at the base. Eventually, a pack of dinosaurs led by the female tyranosaur, nicknamed Old One Eye, overran and destroyed the base, leaving Carver lost in time and Reagan dead.

Flesh was a good concept, and Ken Armstrong's solid plotting and scripting made for a good story. The dinosaurs were well researched and rendered, and it was nice to see that none of the various artists made the common mistake of mixing dinosaurs from various eras. Old One Eye was popular enough to spawn two successors, her son Satanus in Judge Dredd's journey through the Cursed Earth (73-76), and her grandson Golgotha in ABC WARRIORS (134-136).

DAN DARE (1-23, 28-85, 100-107, 109-126)

Dan Dare was the strip which was intended to sell 2000AD. Britain's favourite space adventure hero had been exquisitely rendered by Franks Bellamy and Hampson in EAGLE, Britain's most respected comic, for over a decade, and it was thought that parents recognising the name would buy 2000AD for their children, and even sneak a read themselves. He was given the two colour pages in the centre of the comic to begin his episodes on, and more than his fair share of covers.

However, in order that he fit the mold of 2000AD more easily, Dan Dare was thoroughly revamped to the point where his only similarity with the old character was the name. All the old supporting cast were left in oblivion (although Sondarr was to return 18 months later), and Dare himself became a mean son of a gun.

Gerry Finley-Day, Ken Armstrong, Kelvin Gosnell & Jack Adrian filled the scripts with action and all the pre-requisite aliens and spaceships, and the strip was initially drawn by Massimo Belardinelli, whose vivid imagination was responsible for some of the most repulsive aliens to appear in the comic. But Dare didn't catch on. Dave Gibbons took over the art, the Mekon, Britain's most famous comic villain, was re-introduced and Dan got a new supporting cast, but still he floundered. By this time Judge Dredd was indisputably 2000AD's most popular character, and Dan Dare's spaceship was blown up, leaving him to float off into space attached to a piece of wreckage. He was rescued 15 progs later by the Mekon, who was dying, and needed Dare to fetch the crystal of life in order to save him. Dare, minus his memory, agreed to do so. It was the basis of a good story, but writer Tom Tully let the strip meander, and Dave Gibbons seemed to be uninspired by it. The decision was eventually made to gradually phase Dan Dare out, and replace him with a female space pirate named Morag. Before this could happen though, TORNADO was merged into 2000AD, causing Dare to be dropped, and neither he nor Morag has been seen since. One of Britain's greatest comic artists, Brian Lewis, produced his last artwork on the strip in progs 61-63. It's a sad fact that Britain's premier comic hero is best remembered for the artists that drew him.

M.A.C.H. ONE (1-46, 53-64)

John Probe was the Man Activated by Compu-puncture Hyperpower. His strength, speed and senses were increased by a series of acupuncture-style injections, and a set of computer circuits that fed data and advice directly into Probe's brain were imprinted onto his skull. For all the dressing, Probe was obviously inspired by the Six Million Dollar Man, and his escapades were remarkably similar. Alan Hebden's early scripts sent Probe on rescue and investigation missions where surprise and strength were necessary. Later stories were continued over 3 or 4 weeks, and were all the better for not having to introduce someone powerful enough to be a match for Probe and have him defeated in four pages. Eventually, Probe began to distrust his superiors, opinions re-inforced by attempts to destroy his mindless predecessor, M.A.C.H. Zero, the result of the compu-puncture experiments gone wrong. There was a short break after Mach Zero's rampage had been stopped, and when Probe returned it was revealed that he needed regular compu-puncture injections in order to remain alive. It also meant that his decision to resign couldn't be carried out. Probe eventually threw himself in front of a bullet aimed by his commander at an alien, and he died.

This strip could have fitted into any adventure comic, and that seemed to be the view of the staff at 2000AD. No artist ever became associated with the strip, and at least seven writers worked on the

feature at different times. The result was stories that were adequate enough, but never anything special. Despite all this M.A.C.H. 1 was the longest-running strip set in the present to appear in 2000AD, and his last appearances, when a modicum of continuity was introduced, proved enjoyable.

HARLEM'S HEROES (1-27)

2000AD Prog 1 closed with this story, a strip that used a theme that has regularly recurred in the comic, futuristic sports. Harlem's Heroes were a team of black Americans who played aeroball, a game that was "football, boxing, kung-fu and basketball all r o l l e d into one. Players roar through the air wearing jetpacks (controlled by buttons on their belts), and score air strikes by getting the ball into the scoretank." The scoretank was a multi-socketed box (later redesigned as a three-dimensional cross shape) placed at the top of a pole. Somewhat inspired by Rollerball, the strip followed the team as they played the matches necessary to win the world club championship. There were a few complications, though. In the first episode only four of the team survived a road accident, one of them becoming a disembodied brain who managed the re-built team. Harlem's Heroes had to face attacks by a horrifically ugly psychotic cyborg named Artie Gruber during their games, and there was more than one instance of sabotage. The reader saw a shadowed figure directing Gruber, but it wasn't until the final episode that the man was revealed to be the Heroes' sponsor, TV magnate Bud Cord. The explanation for his actions proved to be extremely disappointing. He felt that the Heroes were too skilful, and there was not enough violence in their games, and blamed this for his falling TV ratings.

Harlem's Heroes were always imaginative and suspenseful, and the whole series was extremely well paced by scripter Tom Tully. The main characters (Giant, Zack & Slim) were all rather one-dimensional, but it was the action that counted here, and action was always excitingly portrayed by artist Dave Gibbons, especially when Artie Gruber was around. The teams that faced the Heroes were always well thought out, with Tom Tully usually taking a poke at the nationality of the opposition. The Bushido Blades, from Japan, all dressed as feudal Shogun warriors, and had this tendency to go into kamikaze dives when a substitution was required! The game itself was also well thought out, with enough twists to keep any reader happy. It's a shame that an extremely entertaining series was ruined by a trite ending.

The Heroes returned in Inferno.

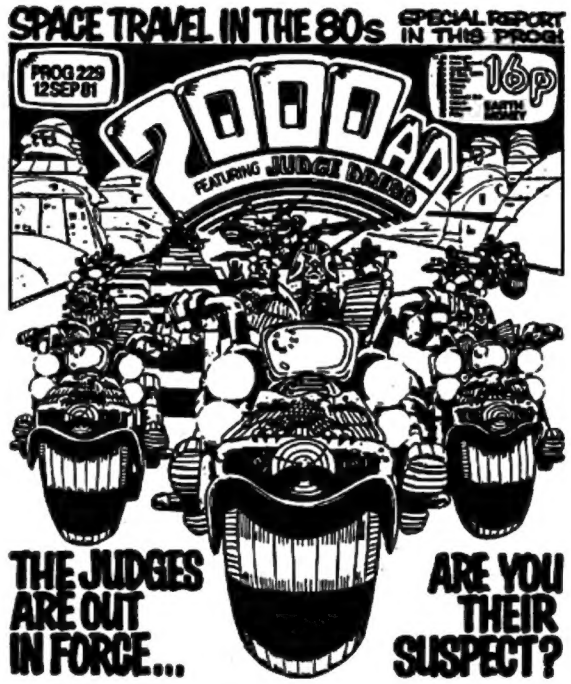
JUDGE DREDD (2-108, 110-154, 156 on)

It was intended that Dan Dare would be the main selling point for 2000AD, but Judge Dredd very quickly became the character who carried the comic, eventually spinning off into a newspaper strip during 1981. Dredd operates in Mega-City 1, a huge futuristic city that by 2099 occupies the whole Eastern coast of the USA, stretching westwards to the Great Lakes. Keeping 800,000,000 million people from breaking the law are the judges. Invested with the powers of today's police force, special patrol group, army and judges, they patrol the city on their lawmasters, exceptionally powerful motorbikes that can be operated vocally by remote control, and contain a computer and more weaponry than any of James Bond's cars.

A heirachy of judges, the Council of Five, also replaces today's congress, making the Mega-City an autocratic state.

To become a judge, 15 years training from the age of five is required at the Mega-City Academy, followed by graduation with full honours, and approval by a qualified judge after a trial run under combat conditions. Only after all that does a candidate get to wear the distinctive helmet, boots and badge and carry a lawgiver, the judge's gun, which fires seven different types of shell. Most resolute of all the judges is Judge Dredd, a particularly humourless specimen who doesn't suffer fools gladly, and believes in upholding the law at all costs, even when it meant killing his own brother. The law is his life, and he's never been portrayed without his helmet on. Dredd's favourite phrase is 'I am the Law', and it's inspired a Human League song, which can be taken as an indication of the breadth of Dredd's appeal. Not surprisingly, accusations of fascism are regularly levelled at Dredd and the city, but that is just the way that it's run.

The initial concept for the series came from John Wagner (who has written almost every episode, under his aliases of John Howard and T.B. Grover), with the name coming from Pat Mills (who's written almost every episode that Wagner hasn't). The original premise of the series was that Dredd would operate out of the New York of 2099, but Carlos Ezquerra's initial roughs for the design of the city were so impressive that they inspired the idea of the Mega-City, which has been almost as important to the success of the strip as the concept of the Judges. Wagner has built many stories around various aspects of the Mega-City and life in (and later outside) it, and each has added to the legend. The Smokatorium is the only building in the city where smoking is permitted. The Cityblocks are skyscrapers housing anything up to 60,000 citizens, and they're named after almost anyone--



among others, there have been a Paul Gadd Block, a Des O'Connor Block, a Bugs Bunny Block, a Billy Carter Block, a Dan Tanna Block, a Charles Darwin Block, an Eisner Block, and a Sonny Bono Block. The Mo-Pads are mobile homes that tour the city endlessly. Umpty Candy is a sweet so good that it's addictive. There's a plastic that can turn people into living pinballs, and lasers flash adverts onto the moon.

My own favourites are Wagner's digs at TV. The illegal 'You Bet Your Life' saw people doing exactly that. On 'Sob Story' people begged in front of the cameras for money to solve their various problems. On 'Any Confessions' citizens confessed their crimes in front of a judge in order to win money on their release from jail. On another planet full-scale battles were televised, complete with a commentator interviewing the casualties, and a studio panel analysing the destruction. The recent destruction of Mega-City 1 is going to have widespread repercussions on the direction of the strip, although, such is the power wielded by the judges, they could easily have the city re-built by its citizens.

The world outside the city has also been explored in the series. A vast radioactive wasteland known as the Cursed Earth separates Mega-City 1 from its counterpart on the West Coast of the USA. There's also a Texas City, unofficially known as Mega-City 3, a Luna City on the moon, and, on the other side of the polluted Black Atlantic, an area known as Sov-Block, which also has its judges, and was responsible for the destruction of Mega-City 1.

Many Judge Dredd tales have run over two or three parts, but the best remembered stories are those that ran over a longer period of time. The first of these was the Cursed Earth story, which ran in Progs 61-86. A plague was running through Mega-City 2, turning people into destructive maniacs. There was an antidote, but it couldn't be flown to Mega-City 2 because the airport had been occupied by the disease-ridden population, so Dredd chose to travel by land across the devastated, mutant-ridden Cursed Earth to deliver the antidote to Mega-City 1's sister city. He was accompanied by two other Judges, and also Spikes Harvey Rotten, a criminal biker -- but Dredd was the only member of

the original team to reach Mega-City 2. On his travels through the Cursed Earth, Dredd encountered even stranger people and events than those to be found in the City. Robotic vampires, alien slave traders, McDonalds and Burger King literally fighting over the ownership of a town, a tyrannosaur running wild, and a complex run by a man who was the finger-lickin' image of Colonel Sanders. His name was Dr Gribbon, and he controlled a stable of androids that resembled famous advertising trademarks. Included in Jack Adrian's script were the Tate and Lyle sugar cube, the Planters peanut, Michelin man, and the Jolly Green Giant. The latter's owners objected to the depiction of their property, and a few progs later a half-page strip appeared in 2000AD, in which Judge Dredd and Spikes Rotten were eating Green Giant sweetcorn and thanking their lucky stars that the real Jolly Green Giant wasn't anything like the one that they had encountered!

The second epic began in Prog 89, almost immediately after Dredd's return to Mega-City 1. It concerned the attempt to overthrow the insane Judge Cal, who had taken control of the city after assassinating the Chief Judge. This tale differed from the Cursed Earth story because it was a continuous story, rather than individual episodes with a central thread. The "Judge Child" story (156-181) and the "Mega-Rackets" (210-223) followed the pattern of "The Cursed Earth", and the current "Block War/Apocalypse War" series is continuous. The other best-remembered Dredd stories have probably been those which featured Judge Death (149-151, 224-228), an alien from another dimension where it had been judged that all crime was committed by the living--therefore, to eradicate crime, life must be eradicated.

One of the nicer things about the Judge Dredd strip is that, rather like American comics, anything previously introduced in the strip can be picked up on and expanded. A horrendously ugly gentleman named Otto Sump was placed on "Sob Story" by Judge Dredd in order to trap some crooks. His impassioned begging won him a fortune. 50 issues later, Sump had opened up a series of "Ugly Clinics", designed to make people ugly-looking by using Sump's cosmetics. Another story was written around them, complete with fake advertisements for the products.

Dredd has always been a writer's strip. On the art side, the quirky style of Ian Gibson and the exaggeration of Mike McMahon have worked just as well as the realistic and meticulous approach of Ron Smith and Brian Bolland.

The tremendous success of Judge Dredd has really shaped the future of 2000AD, leading to greater emphasis being placed on science fiction, to the exclusion of all straight adventure stories set in the present.

SUPERCOVERS (19-43)

The Supercovers were an editorial feature. They started with an unusual front cover illustration, not related to any of the regular strips inside, which would be explained in a 250-word short story on the editorial page. Many artists produced their first 2000AD work on the Supercovers, and the standard of art on the cover was usually far higher than the standard of writing inside.

SHAKO (19-35)

A CIA plane crashed inside the Arctic circle, throwing loose as it went down a capsule containing a new virus strain. The capsule was swallowed by a large polar bear, necessitating a massive hunt to regain the capsule. Shako (the eskimo name for polar bear) rampaged through 74 of the most tedious pages ever to appear in 2000AD, and, once again, it could have appeared in any IPC adventure comic. There was only the "bear" thread of plot described above to hold together 15 episodes, and the story was padded out with the bear disposing of all his pursuers in various ways, all extremely violent. Credits for the writers and artists were introduced the week after this strip finished, saving Mills and Wagner's identity as scripters. I'm sure that the artists would prefer to retain their anonymity. Oh, in case any of you were wondering, the capsule was too large to pass all the way through the bear's digestive system.

THARG (24,129,145,146,155,162, 176,177,180-182,198-200, 207-209,222,223,243,244,260)

Tharg is the omnipotent, green-skinned Betelgueesian who is responsible for maintaining the "thrill power" in 2000AD, if his editorials are to be believed. The first Tharg story appeared as early as Prog 24, written in a totally different style to the Tharg stories that appear today. Written and drawn by Kev O'Neill, it showed a 'Wonder Comics' fan being exposed to the marvels of 2000AD, resulting in an excess of thrill power that left him gibbering.

The next Tharg story in 129 set the style for all future tales. This one showed Tharg at work, supervising his script and art robots, with the aid of his assistant robot, AALN 1, who wore a Tam-O'-Shanter and called people "Jimmy", leading to speculation that he could be Alan Grant, then Assistant Editor at 2000AD. With one exception, a morality tale in which a reader who'd traced a drawing and submitted it was visited by Tharg, successive stories have all been similar incestuous pastiches, or totally over-the-top stories in which Tharg faces his enemies, the Dictators of Zrag and the Thrill-Suckers, who cause apathy in 2000AD readers. Tharg stories are derided as puerile by many, but they're not intended to be taken seriously, and are always amusing.

FUTURE SHOCKS

The first Future Shock appeared in Prog 25, and they've turned up ever since, sometimes for continued runs, and other times sporadically. A Future Shock is basically an O. Henry type story with a science fiction or mystery theme, a one or two page strip with a twist at the end -- although over the last year the stories have tended to be longer, sometimes running to six pages. They were originally intended as a testing ground for new contributors, and quite a few people from comics fandom have contributed stories, notably Phil Greenaway, Mike Cruden and some character named Martin Lock. Only artists Brett Ewins, Brendan McCarthy and Garry Leach have gone on to doing regular work for 2000AD though. Obviously, with so many people contributing over the years, the quality of the Future Shocks has varied from the sublime to the trite and predictable. My personal favourite appeared in Prog 203 and was the work of Alan Moore and Ian Gibson. Some really gross aliens arrive on Earth as tourists and are gradually sold the whole planet by con men, starting with the Eifel Tower and progressing to large countries. The twist is that, according to galactic law, as representatives of the planet, the con men have made legally binding sales, and turned the planet over to the Grawks.

INFERNO (36-75)

Using the remaining characters from HARLEM'S HEROES, Inferno was a new future game, scripted once again by Tom Tully, and drawn by Belardinelli. The idea was that Aeroball had become too passive for spectators, and so the even more violent Inferno was created. Inferno bore an even greater resemblance to Rollerball than Aeroball had done, using motorcycle riders & a rink, with a cave as a goal and some players with jet-packs. Harlem's Heroes had been enjoyable, but Harlem's Hellcats were better. This time the whole team was given a name and a character, and the action wasn't confined to the Inferno stadium. There was a snag, though--the plot was almost exactly the same as that of the earlier strip. A gambling syndicate was out to destroy the Hellcats, Rip Venner was recruited in exactly the same way that Zack Harper had been, and the syndicate even thawed out Artie Gruber to send against the Hellcats, again disguised as one of a team of androids. Inferno was, however, far more complex than Aeroball, and thus held the reader's interest. The strip ended with the whole team apart from Giant being killed by the syndicate, and Giant deciding to give up sport. An unusual ending for British comics; it wasn't possible to kill Giant too, as he had been seen to have lived until at least 120, appearing with his son in the Judge Dredd strip.

STARLORD

After seeing the initial success of 2000AD, IPC were willing to experiment again, this time with a monthly comic containing two 10-page strips, a 6-page strip, and science fiction features. Unfortunately, it was decided at the last moment that a monthly comic was too radical a departure from the British comics norm, and the magazine was made a weekly, containing five strips. Because advertising had been booked, the comic had to be released on the pre-arranged date, which meant that three new strips had to be created almost overnight before Starlord was launched on May 13th 1978 (the same day as 2000AD's 64th Prog).

Even though it had been editorially hurried, Starlord was still a fine product. For 3 pence more than 2000AD it offered decent paper, with 7 pages of colour, while it regularly featured painted cover art, and the creators of the various strips were credited from the start. It was apparent however that the two strips created for the monthly Starlord were Ro-Busters and Strontium Dog (see main article), as rather more thought had been put into their preparation; Ro-Busters ran 11 pages in the first issue, and the other strips looked hurried in comparison.

PLANET OF THE DAMNED ran in the first ten issues, and concerned the passengers on a plane that flew through a space warp in the Bermuda Triangle. It landed on a planet where the rain was acidic, and various other people who'd gone through the warp at various times warred with each other. Slipshod was the byword here, and

when the passengers finally returned to Earth, their relief was nothing compared to that of the readers.

TIME-QUAKE starred a group of temporal policemen drawn from Earth's past and future, who were attempting to save the Earth from a race of malevolent aliens called the Droons. The Droons meanwhile were attempting to rule the future by changing crucial events in Earth's past. The time travellers then went back to re-alter events, or to stop the Droons. The strip was occasionally entertaining, but the artwork was uninspiring -- and the premise must have confused the hell out of the younger readers. It was dropped after issue 18, to re-appear briefly in 2000AD Progs 148 to 151.

MIND WARS began in issue 2, and lasted until the end. Twins Ardeni and Arlen Lakam gained incredible mental powers from the radiation blast that killed their parents, and become caught up in a war between the human-controlled Federation and the alien Jugla Empire. Scripting was by Alan Hebden throughout, with art by Jesus Redondo in all but two chapters, and they produced a very compelling story that was actually suspenseful, because absolutely nobody in the series was safe. The ending was rushed due to Starlord's impending cancellation, so 2000AD could do worse than pick up on the loose ends here when looking for a new series. As it happens, my two favourite Starlord covers (11 and 18) both featured this serial. See Bem #33 for a fuller appreciation.

The only other series featured in Starlord was HOLOCAUST, which related private eye Carl Hunter's attempts to stop some rubbery extraterrestrials from invading Earth. It's best forgotten.

The concensus of opinion among IPC staffers is that had Starlord appeared monthly, as originally planned, with more thought put into the hurried strips, it would have succeeded. As it is, the weekly Starlord lasted 22 issues and a summer special (although through the vagaries of British comic publishing there has been a Starlord annual each year until now, though a 1983 one isn't planned), and left us with two good strips, a nice memory, and production qualities that are still something to be aimed for.

BONJO (41-50)

This was the first humour strip to appear in 2000AD. Written and drawn by Kev O'Neill, the star was Bonjo, a giant alien dinosaur who crashed in China, and proceeded to run through a groan-inducing series of gags that varied between three panels and a page in length. Bonjo was eventually eaten by Tharg's living axe, first seen in O'Neill's Tharg story in 2000AD Prog 24.

THE VISIBLE MAN (47-52)

In time-honoured comics tradition, Frank Hart crashed his car into a lorry containing nuclear material. He was saved, but the radiation had turned his skin transparent, rendering his skeleton and internal organs visible. Faced by doctors who wanted to keep him imprisoned in order to study him, and with revulsion from the public when he escaped, Hart managed to stow away on a rocket, and was last seen speeding away from Earth. Presumably the Visible Man would have returned had he proved popular enough, but there's not much that can be done with a transparent man that wasn't done in these six episodes. Pat Mills wrote the strip, and art was by Spaniards Monteo and Trigo.

WALTER THE WOBOT (50-62, 67, 68, 84, 85)

Walter was a robot with a speech defect (not being able to pronounce his 'r's), who'd aided Judge Dredd during the Robot Revolt (Progs 9-15). He'd been granted his freedom, but preferred to stay on as Dredd's servant. He was used as comic relief in the Judge Dredd strip (bringing Dredd his tea in the middle of a shoot-out was one example), and his own strip was out and out humour. The strip was written by John Cooper and drawn by Ian Gibson, and later Brian Bolland. Like Bonjo, it was downright silly and very funny.

COLONY EARTH (52-61)

A trawler fishing near Iceland pulled up a strange metallic humanoid shell with their catch. The trawler goes missing, and is discovered devoid of all life three weeks later by a NATO nuclear submarine, which then also vanishes. Naval intelligence officer James Hunter takes command of a mission to locate the submarine, and his frogmen discover an impenetrable mini-submarine. All that was fitted into four pages by writer and artist Jim Watson, and he continued to fit as much into his four pages over the next few progs. The mystery was drawn out for another two weeks, before the metallic shells are revealed to be robots capable of emitting laser beams from their eyes, controlled by a gnome-like race of extraterrestrials who'd occupied the Earth millions of years ago, and now intended to re-colonise the planet. To this end they were making topographical changes to the Earth from a space station. Hunter destroyed the station and the series ended, never to be picked up on again. A great shame, because Watson's plotting, pacing and dialogue was as good as any seen in 2000AD, even if his artwork was merely functional rather

than decorative. This was without doubt the best short series to run in 2000AD.

DEATH PLANET (62-70)

Alan Hebden and artist Lopez produced the saga of Commander Lorna Varn, who was in charge of a transport ship carrying cryogenically frozen humans to a new planet for re-settlement. The ship apparently malfunctioned, and crash-landed on a planet where the water was poisonous, and the animal life nearly all hostile. All very good, but R.E. Wright's "Planet of the Damned" was running concurrently

in Starlord, and the two strips were remarkably similar. An old colleague of Lorna Varn's, Zeena Dra Gornik, was introduced, and it was revealed that she had been responsible for sabotaging the ship, and causing it to land on the planet from which she ran her space piracy operations. It was an extremely gratuitous introduction aimed at changing the direction of the strip, and it didn't really work. All tedious stuff.

MACH ZERO (65-75, 162-165)

Mach Zero was the mindless creation of the compu-puncture experiment responsible for the creation of MACH 1--Zero was the prototype, though. The acupuncture had imbued him with tremendous physical strength, but regressed him mentally.

Created by current 2000AD editor Steve McManus, Zero had appeared in the MACH 1 strip and been recaptured. In Prog 65 he escaped once again, this time from an attempt to drown him, emerging from the River Thames in time to rescue flamboyant escapologist Cousin George from a metal coffin underwater, earning only hate for ruining the "act". Cousin George captured Zero to use him in shows, by claiming to hold Zero's son in captivity. With that, Geoffrey Miller took over the scripting and Mike Dorey became the regular artist. Together they introduced a Dickensian setting of squalor and poverty to the strip, as Zero was aided by an army of tramps he'd earlier saved. Zero's first series concluded with him being captured again.

By Prog 162 he was loose again, and working as a railway porter. The effects of the compu-puncture were taking their toll though, and he was dying. One day a train pulls into Zero's station, and one of the passengers is his son, now unhappily adopted. Zero follows him, catching him as he is preparing to leave his adoptive home, and at the same time Zero is caught by the army, acting under orders from the Prime Minister to recapture him. Zero is shot and dies, but just before he does so, his intelligence is returned. Ian Rogan's script for this 4-parter (the last story to run under 10 weeks) was wonderfully warming, and Zero went out with a grace rarely seen in mindless characters.

ANT WARS (71-85)

A Brazilian army patrol dropped some experimental insecticide gas on some anthills, and the result was a strain of giant mutated ants that rampaged through 15 progs. Gerry Finley-Day's script was minimal, merely sending the ants on a new destructive march each week, and the art by Ferrer and Azpiri was similarly uninspired, never rising to anything above passable. The giant ants were eventually killed by their miniature counterparts, who swarmed over the giant ants and ate them. The best thing about this mediocre strip was that it prompted two excellent covers by Kev O'Neill. The first, on Prog 75, featured a giant ant straddling the globe, with an Amazonian native holding a bloodied sword standing below. The other cover, on Prog 78, was designed as the front page of a newspaper, complete with a black and white 'photograph' and an altered title logo.

ROBO-HUNTER (75-84, 100-112, 152-174, 259 on)

Judge Dredd has topped the 2000AD popularity poll almost since his introduction, but the favourite strip of older readers is probably Robo-Hunter. Sam Slade, hunter of renegade robots in the 22nd century, has appeared in two long stories so far, and has now just embarked on his third set of adventures.

Written by John Wagner (under his T.B. Grover alias) and illustrated by Ian Gibson, the pre-requisite for the strip seems to be that the more ludicrous the idea, the better it will suit Robo-Hunter. The world occupied by Sam Slade has robots for every conceivable purpose (in his first appearance, Sam is seen fighting a renegade robot armchair), but it wasn't explored until the second Robo-Hunter story. The first, interrupted for fifteen progs by the merger with Starlord, sent Sam to the planet Verdus, accompanied by foul-mouthed, cigar-smoking pilot Commander Kidd. En route they switch to electron drive for greater speed, with the result on the unshielded ship that Slade is regressed to his mid-twenties, while Kidd becomes a foul-mouthed, cigar-smoking baby.

Verdus was colonised by one robot, whose brief was to construct other robots who would develop the planet into a paradise for human colonists. However, all humans sent to Verdus had disappeared, and Slade had been sent to investigate why. The reason became apparent as soon as Slade arrived on the planet--and was incarcerated as a Sim (Simulated Human). The logic of the robot population was that all real humans had to be even more perfect than they were, since they were the masters. The flawed specimens that had arrived on Verdus weren't perfect--and therefore not humans. In the weeks that followed Slade encountered a robot parody of Earth's society: a robot parliament including the Angry Party, the Very Stupid Party, the Doubtful Party and the Eccentric Party; a robot Rabbi; a pair of robot boots that preferred to travel by taxi; and apoplectic robot generals who eventually destroy the planet in a civil war.

Despite all of the above, the second Robo-Hunter story, "Day of the Droids", makes the first adventure look positively restrained. Back on Earth now, Sam found that all the city's leaders had been replaced by droids, and with the help of his inept robot assistant, Hoagy ("I don't understand, I didn't put an ad in for an assistant." "Nope, I did. Good thing too, otherwise I wouldn't have known about the job."), had to discover why. It was all the work of the God Droid, a huge gangster robot with a Bronx accent who intended to take over the city with the aid of his pin-stripe suited, violin case-toting robots and his replacement droids. To defeat him Slade freed the real leaders, and enlisted the aid of Molotov Cocktail, leader of the Amalgamated Androids Union, who called all robots out on strike and convinced the pin-stripe suited robots to take industrial action for better conditions. The funniest scene in the series concerned Slade's attempt to cross a fighting city with a bomb to blow up the God Droid. To do this, he put the ball inside an American football, and employed the "East Side Androids" football team, complete with robot Coach Cuss ("I want you to get out there and punch 'em, kick 'em, maim 'em, mutilate them, but most of all hate 'em!"), to run the ball through the city. Other memorable droids this time included the Rocko Brothers, cement mixer robots specialising in concrete boots, a robotic cigar with a Cuban accent, and the God Droid's doctor. Unfortunately, one of the concessions that the city leaders had to make in order to get Molotov Cocktail's aid was the outlawing of all robo-hunters. This meant that Slade had to move to Brit-Cit, which is where the third story started.

The Robo-Hunter stories have all been tightly plotted, running smoothly from week to week, and the fact that they're written to be enjoyed on two levels, the humour and the straight adventure, makes for an excellent strip that is as good as the best of Marvel and DC.

FLESH BOOK II (86-99)

The Trans-Time meat collecting base in the Cretaceous era may have been destroyed in Prog 19, but there were other Trans-Time bases. Flesh Book II by Geoffrey Miller and Belardinelli concentrated on the station in the Triassic period, used to send fish back to the 23rd century. The start of the strip conveniently coincided with the arrival of Claw Carver in the Triassic period, emerging through time from the Cretaceous base. He hid his loot in the cave of a Nothosaur, killing a brood of young in the process, and was picked up by a ship from the base. It was made clear to Carver that he'd have to work his passage back to the 23rd century, and Carver gradually ingratiated himself with the boss of the base at the expense of other workers. The series ended with the base being overrun by various forms of Triassic marine life, and the childless Nothosaur consuming Carver. Although the plot was almost the same as Book I, the scripting was much tighter, and Belardinelli's art was a great improvement on the mixture of people who'd worked on the earlier series. Apparently the series wasn't as popular the second time around, and has been dropped.

THARG

Tharg arrived on Earth early in 1977, and began producing 2000AD, writing the editorials, and answering the queries from Earthlets on his letters page. He comes from Betelgeuse, but, luckily for us, he is able to survive on Earth on a steady diet of polystyrene cups from vending machines.

Tharg cuts an impressive figure. Tall and green, with the Rosette of Sirius on his forehead (for sub-space communication) he's also omnipotent -- which is just as well, since he has to protect the galaxy's greatest comic from his arch-enemies, the Dictators of Zrag.

When not defending mankind, Tharg stays at his command module, which is cunningly disguised as the Kings Reach Tower office block which is IPC's London headquarters. There he supervises his script and art robots, ensuring maximum thrill power for each Prog, and making sure that no Thrill-suckers (apathy-inducing insects) infest his comic, or its readers.

In reality, Tharg is whoever happens to be editor at 2000AD at the time, and his various alter egos have obviously had great fun writing replies to the letters in Tharg's name, and administering Rigellian hotshots to non-believers. They've also introduced a series of Betelgeusian phrases into the comic, including:

BORAG THUNGG	Galactic Greetings
FLORIX GRABUNDAE	Many Thanks
FROGNAM GRUELIS	April Fool
GHAFFLEBETTE	Out of this World
GREXNIX	Idiot
KRILL TRO THARGO	Honoured by Tharg
QUAEQUAM BLAG	Sacre Blue
SCROTNIG	Thrill-Powered
SPLUNDIG VUR THRIGG	Farewell
SQUAXX DEK THARGO	Friend of Tharg
	(Every 2000AD reader is)
ZARJAZ	Fantastic

RO-BUSTERS (86-101, 103-115)

Owned by Howard Quartz, a human brain encased in a metal body, Ro-Busters was a team of robots that were bought cheaply and sent on international rescue missions, since robots were expendable should the mission fail. The two featured robots were Ro-Jaws, a two-wheeled sewer cleaning droid, and Hammerstein, a biped war droid, both of whom had been scheduled for destruction prior to their purchase by Quartz. That was the basis of the strip when it appeared in Starlord, where it was written by creator Pat Mills and Jack Adrian. After one two-part story along similar lines in 2000AD, the emphasis of the strip altered completely, as Hammerstein's war memoirs were related, followed by Ro-Jaws' past, which was liberally adapted from 'Black Beauty'. An excellent four-part story by Mills and Dave Gibbons focussing on the Terra-Meks, massive demolishing and building robots, followed, and then there was a multi-part story in which Ro-Busters was disbanded due to falling profits. Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein became involved in an attempt to ferry robots to a robot planet, and freedom. They succeed, but don't manage to escape themselves.

The contrasting coarseness of Ro-Jaws and "stiff upper lip" superiority of Hammerstein made a good basis for the series, and other supporting robots, such as Dr Feelygood, a medical robot who communicated by flashing words onto a screen on his chest, and the suffering Casey, a humanoid robot designed to be medically experimented upon, were just as well conceived.

The Ro-Busters strip was always fun, and the characters of Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein have been retained, Hammerstein later starring in ABC Warriors and Ro-Jaws acting as an editorial character, doing book and film reviews and introducing the "Robo-Tales".

STRONTIUM DOG (86-94, 104-118, 178-197, 200-206, 210-221, 224-233)

This was the other strip retained from Starlord, and was seemingly created as that title's surrogate Judge Dredd: an all-out action strip starring an almost omnipotent agent of the law. That's where the similarities end. Johnny Alpha is a mutant (with X-ray vision) in a society which despises mutants and only permits them to work as Search and Destroy agents, derisively known as Strontium Dogs, whose job is the 22nd century equivalent of the bounty hunter. Alpha is accompanied by a giant red-haired Nordic gent named Wulf (who comes complete with hokey phonetic-ised Scandanavian/English dialogue) and a long-nosed furry alien named Gronk, whose mouth is in its stomach. It has a low excitement threshold, and lives on an exclusively metal diet. All Strontium Dogs come equipped with a deadly array of weapons. Bullets that can pass through one body and detonate in another, time bombs that move people into the future, by which time the planet has moved on in space, beam polarisers that attract all ray-gun fire within an area, electrified brass knuckles, and mini nuclear bombs -- those weapons all turned up in Johnny Alpha's first 5 appearances, and more have been added since, making Judge Dredd's lawgiver seem positively archaic. The Strontium Dogs operate from a satellite, and are recognised throughout the galaxy. Some cases even send them into the past, such as the case in Progs 182-188 in which Johnny Alpha and Wulf are sent back to apprehend Adolf Hitler.

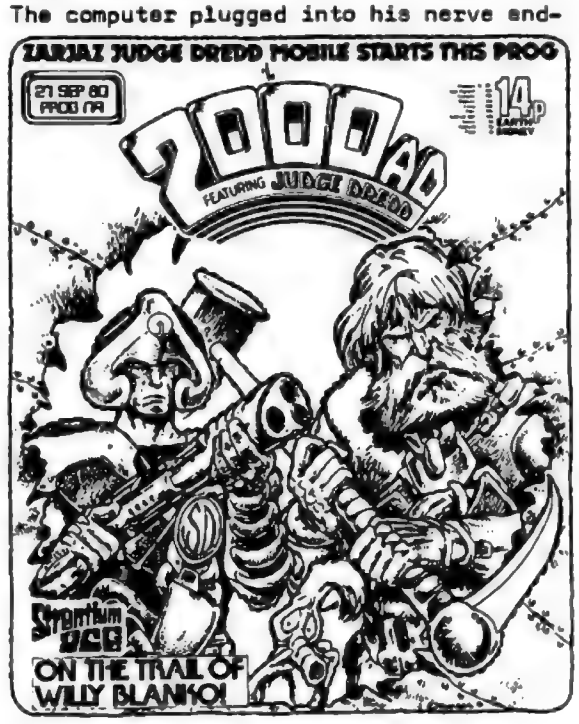
Apart from a two-part story in Starlord and a story in a summer special, Carlos Ezquerra has drawn every Strontium Dog story, in his semi-Moebius style, with T.B. Grover writing all the Starlord appearances of the character, and continuing until Prog 118. With Alpha's return in Prog 178 Alan Grant became permanent scripter.

The tales in Starlord never ran over three episodes, but the transfer to 2000AD brought longer stories. The most memorable of these were a serial in which a crook named Fly's Eyes Wagner was chased through hell (104-118), and the 19-part "Portrait of a Mutant" (200-206, 210-221). That story gave the background to the Earth of Alpha's time, showing the war that led to the creation and birth of mutants, and it was revealed that Alpha's real surname was Kreelman, a name that he had to keep quiet, because his father had climbed to political power on the back of a mutant hate campaign. Once in power, Kreelman had taken all freedom away from the mutants, eventually consigning them to ghettos, and in the process he turned out his son. Kreelman's actions led to an uprising by the mutants, and his career was ended years later by a time bomb that made him relive forever the moment he begged Alpha not to kill him.

One of the most irritating aspects of this fine strip is the fact that no adequate reason has ever been given for Wulf being so friendly with a mutant, people who are universally despised by normal humans everywhere, but other than that Strontium Dog has always been a good strip. It's exciting and wide in scope, and greatly helped by the consistency of writers and artist. It's also always been popular with the readers, coming second only to Judge Dredd when one adds up the total number of appearances in 2000AD.

ANGEL (95-99)

Harry Angel's plane crashed, and the heat of the accident fused the plane's computer onto the right side of Angel's chest and onto the top of his right arm. The computer plugged into his nerve end-



ings, treating Angel as a plane, and boosting his muscular control, reflexes and co-ordination, and increased his mechanical aptitude. In five weeks Angel managed to save the US President's life, and uncovered a traitor in the British army. Chris Stevens scripted, and the art was by Carlos Pino, but Angel was really nothing more than a surrogate MACH 1, and was never seen again.

RICK RANDOM (113-118)

Rick Random was a 25th Century space detective, who had originally appeared during the 1950's. For his 1979 revival, he was placed in a "Ten Little Indians" plot occurring at an intergalactic peace conference. Unfortunately, Steve Moore chose to write the story in the style of the 1950's, and it was totally out of place in the 2000AD of the late 1970's. Moore even had the killer finally revealed as the first victim.

Rick Random is generally regarded as one of the worst strips to appear in 2000AD, an opinion probably made all the more acute by the fact that the strip was the replacement for the extremely popular Robo-Hunter. Art was by Ron Turner, except for the last chapter, which was credited to one "L.J. Silver", whose style was suspiciously similar to that of a rather rushed Carlos Ezquerra.

DISASTER 1990 (119-139)

Featuring the return of Bill Savage, hero of the earlier "Invasion", the disaster in the title could refer to the strip itself; or the fact that a nuclear explosion at the North Pole flooded the whole of Britain. Savage appropriated an old amphibious vehicle from the Imperial War Museum (luckily its fuel tanks were perpetually full), and rescued Hydrology Professor Bamber. The two of them floated around the country encountering various communities, private armies, and forms of marine life, before becoming involved in a fight to relieve London from a Hitler lookalike dictator.

This was all rather mundane meandering stuff from Gerry Finley-Day, although it was noticeable that Savage wasn't the sadistic thug that he'd been two years earlier (or became nine years later, depending on how you look at it) in Invasion. The strip ended with the North Pole gradually reforming, and the statement that all would be well within three years.

A.B.C. WARRIORS (119-139)

Hammerstein's war memoirs in Ro-Busters (88-92) were popular enough to inspire this series featuring a squad of robot warriors. The ABC referred to in the title stood for Atomic Bacterial and Chemical, the things the robots were created to withstand, but it was all but meaningless, since it referred to the original war premise of the strip, and ABC Warriors very quickly developed beyond that. Gathered by Hammerstein, each robot had a specific skill and personality. Joe Pineapples only spoke in code, but was an expert marksman. Happy Shrapnel was an irascible character who liked to dress up, and for the most part looked like something from the American Civel War. Mongrol was a huge, almost mindless, robot with incredible strength. Dreadlock was master of the Knights Martial, a group of mentally advanced robots who studied the occult arts. General Blackblood was a Volgan robot who was an expert in guerilla warfare. He'd been re-programmed before joining the ABC Warriors, but his allegiance always remained suspect. The final ABC Warrior was the Mess. Once the finest war robot built, he'd been melted down. Amazingly he survived in a liquid state, and was kept in a tube until required.

Once completed, the squad was sent to maintain law and order on Mars, a planet colonised by humans who were beset by marauding bikers, rampaging planet-taming robots, and warring corporations.

Scripts were by Pat Mills throughout, and he turned in some fine stories, including one of my favourite 2000AD stories as the strip's swansong in Progs 137-139. The star of this particular tale was George, a skyscraper size robot who had been constructed with a brain controlling each limb separately, with a master brain to control the other brains. Unfortunately, the master brain was not powerful enough to maintain any control over the other brains, and as they argued the whole time, George was rather clumsy to say the least. Most of the time he wandered the open spaces on the planet, because although he was well intentioned, he wasn't allowed near towns due to his potential for accidental destruction being so great. His existence was made miserable by constant teasing by humans in planes, employed by the Boil Corporation, whose aim was to destroy all wildlife, so that the humans on Mars would be forced to eat their synthetic food. The ABC Warriors took control of all of George's brains, and used him to smash the corporation's factory. Afterwards George decided to let the soldiers from the factory end his existence, rather than survive in his retarded state. The Warriors respected his right of choice and left him, but the first shell to hit George broke open the Mess's container, and the Mess flowed into the tubes which linked George's brains, uniting them and leaving George a complete robot.

Artwork on the strip was by a variety of people, with Mike McMahon's being the most impressive. Pat Mills created some excellent and well-defined personalities for the robots, and built some good plots around them. The strip ended when he decided to move on to other things (as did Ro-Busters), but it was left open-ended, so could return one day.

PROJECT OVERKILL (119-126)

The plane of American airline pilot Kenny Harris is caught in a severe storm, necessitating an emergency landing on an empty roadway. As the occupants of the plane disembark, they are met by men dressed in black armour who inform them that the plane has landed on a top secret government project named Overkill, and that they should leave as soon as they can. As Harris is about to take off again he is knocked unconscious, only to awaken alone two days later, and read in a paper that his plane has crashed. His investigations into Project Overkill eventually lead him to the discovery that Overkill

was an underground computer designed to retain the total knowledge of mankind, should a nuclear catastrophe occur. The location was so secret that not even the President was aware of Overkill's exact position, but he was able to watch on a video screen as a cave-in destroyed all communication channels during the opening.

As various Overkill agents have been following and attempting to murder Harris, he flies over the Overkill site with the intention of dive-bombing it, but instead he's captured and brought before the computer, which has now taken over Overkill. The computer planned to explode all nuclear power plants in the USA, having

judged mankind obsolete. Harris averts the disaster -- at the cost of his life.

Kelvin Gosnell produced an extremely interesting script, but fell down slightly on the atrocious dialogue that he gave Harris. It's also unfortunate that the ending had to be rushed, due to the impending merger with Tornado, since it left holes in the plot that even the Hulk could have seen through. The worst one was that it was never explained why Harris wasn't turned into a mindless slave like the rest of the humans on his plane, thus saving the computer any problems with its plans for mankind. Art was by Gibson and Redondo.

BLACKHAWK (127, 128, 130-161)

When Tornado collapsed, three strips were merged into 2000AD -- and the most popular of them proved to be Blackhawk. However, the format of 2000AD required a complete overhaul of the character, so that he fitted in. The Blackhawk of Tornado had been a former Nubian slave in Roman times, who had worked his way up to a soldier, and was always accompanied by a black hawk, hence the name. The first page of his 2000AD run showed Blackhawk being abducted by a transporter beam and arriving on a spaceship. The aliens who ran the ship had the task of collecting warriors for gladiatorial combat in order to entertain other races about the galaxy. Blackhawk found friends in a giant bear-like creature named Ursa and an anthropoidal character named Zog, who was all but mindless. They escaped their captors together, but at a cost: Blackhawk's soul was stolen by a creature named the Soul Sucker. The rest of the series displayed a changed emphasis, as Blackhawk strove to find his stolen soul on Silversun, an extremely convenient world where any conditions that writers Kelvin Gosnell & Alan Grant (working under the pseudonym Alvin Gaunt) chose to create existed.

Blackhawk was another strip that tended to veer off on tangents, forgetting the original premise, but it held together far better than Dan Dare had done, and there were some fine individual scenes (Zog encountering hallucinogenic mushrooms in Prog 155 springs to mind). It was also a strip to study, because artist Belardinelli had the habit of scattering small self-portraits throughout the strip. The instalments not illustrated by Belardinelli were handled by Sola, apart from one Joe Staton job in 133, drawn when he was in London for a convention.

THE MIND OF WOLFIE SMITH (127-134, 136-145, 162-175, 177)

Also salvaged from Tornado, Wolfie Smith was a 1970's teenager possessing ESP. In Tornado Wolfie had been a runaway, chased by the police, and this premise was retained in 2000AD.

For his first 2000AD serial, Wolfie joined a film crew making a film at Stonehenge, and encountered a race of Elder Gods hellbent on taking over the Earth, with only Wolfie standing between them and their aims. The second story by Tully and Redondo was an improvement. A gangster named Harry Crane attached a miniature bomb to Wolfie's head, and threatened to detonate it unless Wolfie aided Kramer's criminal activities. By this time Wolfie's brain had developed far beyond ESP, to levitation, mental projection and control (which was never tried on Kramer) and teleportation, making him a formidable enemy. By the time Wolfie freed himself from Kramer and hunted him down again, Kramer was killed, and the last we saw of Wolfie he was still on the run, although unlikely to run back to 2000AD.

CAPTAIN KLEP (127, 128, 133, 135, 140, 141, 143-147, 149-153, 155-159)

In Britain there are laws pertaining to the merging of comics that state that when one comic is merged into another (a common practice here) a minimum of three strips must be taken on from the cancelled comic. This hadn't applied when Starlord merged with 2000AD, since only four strips had run in Starlord, but Tornado used to run nine strips, resulting in the arrival of Captain Klep at 2000AD.

Captain Klep was a 1-page humour strip drawn by 2000AD art editor Robin Smith. Klep was a Superman-type character who always managed to be the cause of mass devastation that far outweighed the heroic act that he'd performed. The trouble with the strip was that the joke was limited and, therefore, so was the strip. When compared to the real humour to be found as incidental in other strips, Captain Klep just didn't cut it.

THE V.C.s (140-143, 145-165, 168, 169, 171-175)

2351. Earth was at war with the Geeks, aliens known only by their human-coined nickname. The VC's were a team of starship troopers from Earth's colonies who patrolled space and 'vaped' any Geeks that they came across, with VC's being their term for their job -- "Vacuum Cleaners".

The strip began with Steve Smith, a new recruit just out of college, joining the cynical old crew, who were somewhat less than enthusiastic about having a trainee aboard. Of course, Smith eventually worked his acceptance, and became a fully recognised member of the team.

Gerry Finley-Day scripted all but one story (by Ian Rogan in 148-149), and they were his best 2000AD scripts to date. Each of the six VC's had a distinct personality, and each had his turn in the spotlight. Gunner Dwarf's mother had been caught in a radiation attack by the Geeks, and he'd been born stunted and mutated, becoming the best gunner in the galaxy for revenge. Missile man Hen-Sho came from New Peking on Mars, and was torn between patriotism to his xenophobic city and comradeship with his colleagues. Ringer was the pilot from Saturn, and hated all Earthmen. Second Gunner Loon was aptly named, leaving the commander, Jupe, as the only totally level-headed VC. Also on board was a computer with a hippy personality.

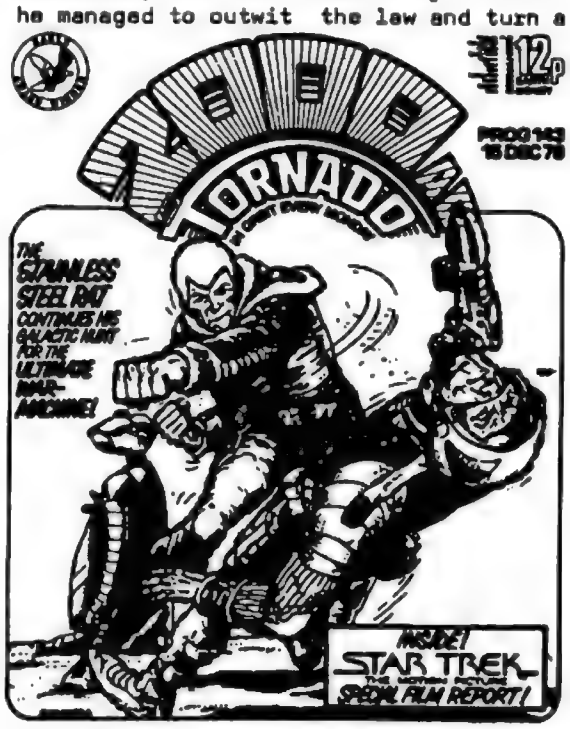
The first few VC stories related small skirmishes on the edge of the galaxy, but when the Geeks attacked our solar system during peace talks, the VC's were amalgamated into a retaliatory force under the command of a 'dishwasher', VC slang for a diplomat. He had it in for the team from the start, and as a result of his actions the whole team, apart from Smith and Jupe, died.

The stories were well-paced, interesting, and topped off with some superb art from the alternating illustrators, Cam Kennedy and Garry Leach.

THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT (140-153, 166-177)

Kelvin Gosnell and Carlos Ezquerra adapted two of Harry Harrison's novels about his thief and adventurer of the future, the Stainless Steel Rat. They started with the first novel, "The Stainless Steel Rat", and then moved straight to the third, "The Stainless Steel Rat Saves The World". For some reason, the second novel in the series was considered unsuitable for adaptation.

Harry Harrison, once a comics creator himself, was reportedly very pleased with the adaptations. They certainly remained true to the books, but to anyone who had read the originals it was apparent that an awful lot had been omitted, presumably due to it not being action-orientated enough for the comic. Nevertheless, someone being introduced to Slippery Jim DiGriz for the first time via this format must have been more than pleased with the character, and the debonair way in which he managed to outwit the law and turn a



profit from almost anything. Ezquerra proved as suited to the humour as he was to the action, and seemed to enjoy visualising the various characters from the books, drawing DiGriz as James Coburn.

These two books have been the only sf novels adapted to run in 2000AD because, apart from the scripter having to split his money with the original author, there are few other science fiction books that lend themselves so easily to adaptation.

RO-JAWS' ROBO-TALES

As is the case with Future Shocks, the Robo-Tales are strips that occasionally appear when a filler strip is required. As the title suggests, the stories all concern robots, and are introduced by Ro-Jaws. The first appeared in Prog 144, and they've appeared intermittently ever since, with most of the earlier tales being written by Gary Rice. In general the Robo-Tales have been well drawn, and better plots seem to have stemmed from the fact that there is no shock ending requirement.

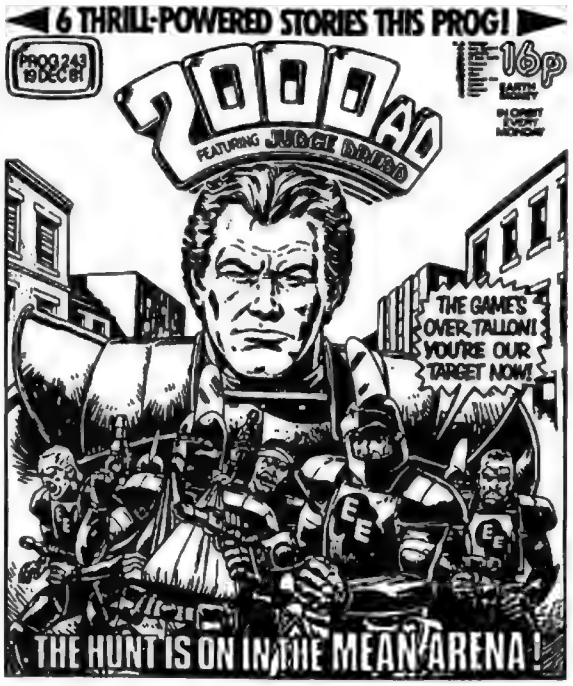
TIMEQUAKE (148-151)

Originally from Starlord, this series concerned a group of temporal policemen who ensured that, after the discovery of time travel, no-one tampered with the history of Earth. In this particular story a woman named Mother Eternal was operating an illegal time travel service, which was stranding people in times other than those which they'd been intending to visit. Jack Adrian scripted, and art was by Jesus Redondo.

FIENDS OF THE EASTERN FRONT (152-161)

In 1980 a British army officer is summoned to an excavation site in West Berlin by a German police officer. They go along a tunnel, and emerge into a room occupied by a skeleton in 1940's German army uniform. The skeleton is holding a diary, which the police officer proceeds to read.

It relates the story of Hans Schmitt, a private who was part of the German offensive on Russia in 1941. It gradually became obvious to Schmitt that the troop


6 THRILL-POWERED STORIES THIS PROG!
2000AD
FEATURING JUDGE DREDD
16p
THE GAME'S OVER, TALLON! YOU'RE OUR TARGET NOW!
THE HUNT IS ON IN THE MEAN ARENA!

of Rumanians accompanying them were vampires. The vampires only attacked the Russians, but once Schmitt discovered their secret, they attacked him as well. He destroyed nine of them before their colonel "put the bite" on him. Rather than become a vampire himself, Schmitt buried himself in the room, wrote the diary, and shot himself with a silver bullet he had been saving for the vampire colonel.

Gerry Finley-Day had a good winter in 79/80, turning out the VC's and the Fiends of the Eastern Front, both of which surpass any other scripts he's produced for 2000AD. This was basically a war story, but Finley-Day added the twist of the vampires, made the hero a German, paced the story very well over ten weeks, and added a surprise ending. The art was by Carlos Ezquerra.

MEAN ARENA (178-180, 182-187, 191-194, 197-202, 218-223, 226-229, 234-244, 246-251, 253-255, 258, 259, 261 on)

By the 21st century, football has become street football. Whole sections of a town are evacuated, a goal is placed at each end of the evacuated area, and each armoured team attempts to cross the town and score a goal by using almost any method. Teams are recognised by their distinctive armour, and the team followed in the strip is Slater's Slayers, home of the greatest street footballer of all, Matt Tallon.

Yes, this is another Tom Tully future sports series. As usual, he worked out an impressive game with complex rules (which are occasionally only revealed when convenient to the story), and all his plot trademarks are there. Instead of starting with someone gunning for the team, the basis of the strip was that Matt Tallon is using the team to track down and kill the people that he believes are responsible for the death of his brother in the Mean Arena. When Tallon gives up his vendetta, the remaining killers come after him instead. If Tully runs true to form, the man behind the death of Tallon's brother will be revealed to be the street football TV commentator, Kevin O'Connor, who has dropped in and out of the series.

The strip has meandered all over the place to such an extent that even the mighty Therg has admitted that it needed re-thinking. Belatedly an attempt has been made to identify and personalise the other members of the team, and that can only be for the good. It's already led to an impressive Bolland cover on Prog 248, illustrating the whole team.

The art on the strip for the first run (up to 202) was by John Richardson, but various people have handled the art since, the most memorable being Steve Dillon in 218-223, in which the relatives of Jaws Jensen, a player hounded to death by Matt Tallon, comes looking for revenge.

DASH DECENT (178-198)

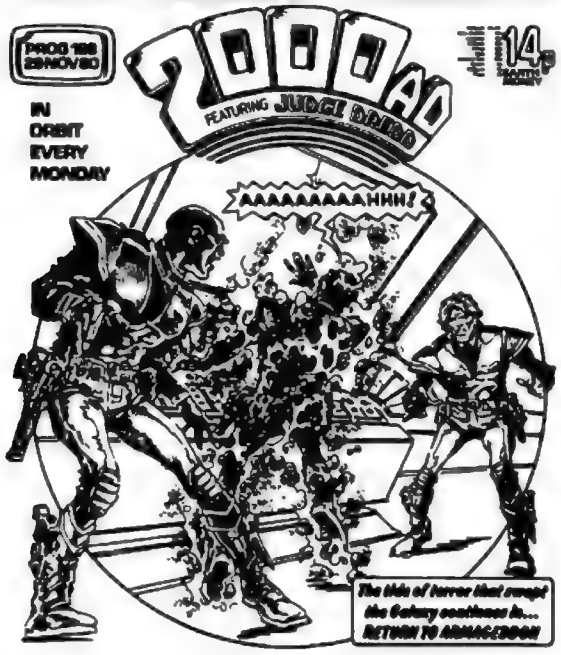
Although humour strips have never been too popular in 2000AD, they've been of a high standard, the inane Captain Klep apart. Dash Decent was plotted and drawn by Kevin O'Neill, and then handed to Dave Angus, who'd improved immeasurably since working on Klep, for scripting. The series was an affectionate parody of the Flash Gordon story, with FBI janitor Dash Decent being sent along to aid the crackpot scientist Dr Zellamy (a caricature of TV botanist David Bellamy), picking up female taxi driver Dale Ardent on the way. From there they travel to the planet Pongo, and pit their wits (none too many, in Dash's case) against the ruler of the planet, Pong the Merciless.

One of the nicest things about the strip was that it was presented as a badly directed film, presumably as a dig at Dino de Laurentis' effort. This enabled a variety of references to special effects and props to be included, and allowed for scenes such as workmen adding glue to a scale version of Pong's palace just before the characters arrive there. Equally amusing were the multitude of throwaway visual jokes, like a filing cabinet in an underwater scene being labelled "Davy Jones' locker", and a statue of Snoopy towering over Dog City.

THE MELTDOWN MAN (178-227)

S.A.S. sergeant Nick Stone was caught in a nuclear explosion, but instead of melting, as expected, he found himself transported to a world populated by intelligent humanoids evolved from animals,

THARG THE MIGHTY PRESENTS...



known as 'Yujees' (a contraction from eugenic bioforms), as well as humans.

Over the weeks it was revealed that on this world, genetic engineering had produced the advanced animals to serve as slaves for the human population, causing a stagnated society in which the humans led pampered lives. In the first episode, Stone encounters a cat-woman, Liana, who he saves from death at the hands of Leeshar, the human commander of the predatory hunting minks. Leeshar had plans to overthrow the rulers of his land, and Stone found himself uniting the Yujees in revolt against the humans in order to stop him. In the middle there was King Seth, one of the earliest attempts at genetic engineering, a cobra that had been given great intelligence and cunning. He was forced to aid Leeshar's takeover, but Seth intended that all humans eventually be overthrown, and to this end escaped to aid Stone.

The guns on Leeshar's world could only be operated by a human fingerprint, so Stone had Earth-style guns built in order to arm the Yujees. At the same time, he sent out messages asking for aid from other Yujees, one reaching Pole-Axe, a mutated Polar Bear who decided to capture the new guns and take over himself. In the meantime it was revealed by King Seth that the world they were on was in fact Earth in the far future, after the South Pole had been struck by a massive asteroid that had tilted the planet 180 degrees, precipitating every kind of natural disaster in the process. The remnants of the human population had been the fore-runners of Leeshar's society. The series ended with Stone coming across a cruise missile that had survived the cataclysm, and turning it on Leeshar's palace.

There was even more to Alan Hebden's plot than that related above, and with Belardinelli art, the story couldn't go wrong. The humanoid animals were wonderfully designed and portrayed, from the predator minks in their combat uniforms, to the various species in Pole-Axe's band of brigands. The appeal and depth of the Yujee supporting characters was such that Hebden was able to focus on them for up to three weeks at a time throughout the series, with no mention of Stone at all. The only fault to be picked with a fine series was the title, which always seemed horrendously contrived and vague.

RETURN TO ARMAGEDDON (185-218)

A colony ship travelled through a space warp, to land on a planet in which humans are frozen in solid ice. Among them is a creature with cloven hooves, horns, and a tail, looking remarkably like the popular conception of the devil. The crew pick this corpse to free from the ice, and return it to the ship, where two cloned children are created from cells found still living in the creature's liver.

Within hours of the cloning, everyone on the ship has been turned into a zombie. A pirate ship then chances upon the now-lifeless hulk, and the pirate captain leads his crew across to loot the ship, taking the children back with him, and putting them into an accelerator to speed up their growth.

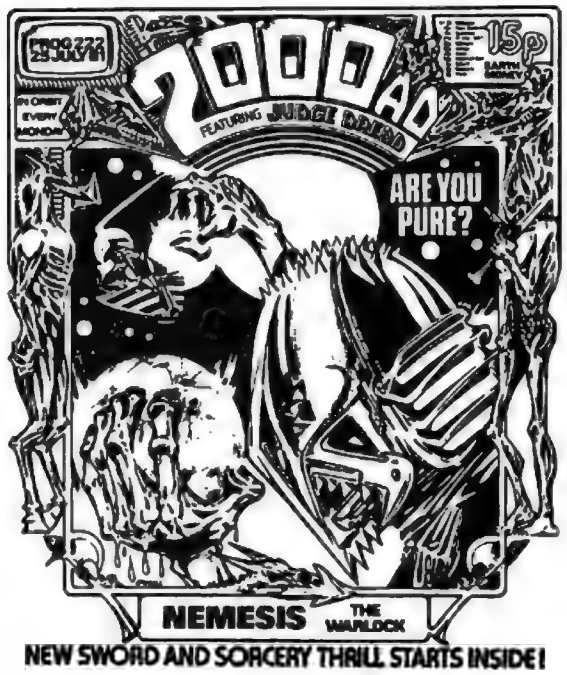
When they emerge one child is a normal adult, and the other resembles the satanic creature originally rescued, His intention is to subjugate the whole of humanity, and the only person capable of stopping him is his twin, Amtrak.

Believe it or not, the plot becomes even more complex and convoluted, making this the hardest 2000AD series to précis concisely. Unfortunately, this complexity is the reason that the series wasn't as good as it could have been. When read in totality, Malcolm Shaw's story is very good and maintains the interest--however, in weekly instalments it was an extremely confusing series. Despite the bad pacing, the series was never predictable, and the final revelation that the whole affair was nothing more than a game on a cosmic scale was quite shocking. Also shocking, at least for the children, were some of the horrifying effects included by artist Redondo. The ghastliest scene to come to mind occurs when the pirate captain is taking the children from the ship, and has to cross a room full of writhing, disembodied hands to do so. It's just as well that that issue wasn't picked up on by the "Festival of Light", a British group opposed to excessive sex & violence in the media.

NEMESIS (167, 178-179, 222-233, 238-240, 243, 244, 246-257)

The planet Termight is what was once Earth, now a totaliterian state ruled by the Terminators, a quasi-religious organisation of the humans who descended from the survivors of an alien attack on Earth. The Terminators see it as their sacred duty to rid the galaxy of all alien life, in order that the same thing can't occur again. Pitted against them is Nemesis, an alien warlock.

This is a series with two origins. The first was in ABC Warriors, where a group of robot wizards had been featured. Also produced by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill, their design was obviously the basis for the stylised Terminators; in fact it was originally intended that Dreadlock from the ABC Warriors be Nemesis. The second origin was a story that had appeared in Prog 167, entitled "Terror Tube". Based on the song 'Going Underground', it related the attempt of Nemesis to escape from Torquemada, the only head of the tube



police, through the car-carrying transport tubes bored through the planet, a concept introduced, but not explored, in the Ro-Busters series. A similar story ran in Progs 178-179. Both were drawn in a cartoony style by O'Neill, and looked nothing like the intricate art that he has done for the strip more recently.

The Nemesis strip is presented in the style of an old illuminated manuscript, complete with credit scrolls listing "Brother Mills" and "Brother O'Neill", with each continued story being a separate 'book'. Nemesis himself has been almost a peripheral character, with the strip focussing for the most part on the actions of Torquemada and his Terminators, with Nemesis appearing only when required. Little has been revealed about Nemesis, other than the fact that he's alien and has a knowledge of sorcery. For further background, refer to the interview with Pat Mills, and the feature "The Making of Nemesis", in Bem #35.

Book II was illuminated by Jesus Redondo, who produced a fine job, but didn't seem as adept at handling the humorous touches that run through the strip as O'Neill.

ROGUE TROOPER (228-232, 234-243, 246-258, 260-262, 265 on)

Rogue Trooper exists on Nu-Earth, a planet that has seen a continuing war between the Norts and Southers for over 20 years. The Trooper is a genetic infantryman, biologically engineered to be able to walk the poisoned planet without a protective suit, and almost the only survivor of the Quartz Massacre, an attack which wiped out the infantrymen's base.

The trained GI's were considered too valuable to lose in battle, so they had a chip implanted into them that automatically recorded their brain patterns at the time of death. The chips are able to talk, and when recovered they can be implanted into a new body. Once a Souther, Rogue is now without allegiances, and wanders Nu-Earth with three chips, attempting to track down the men responsible for the Quartz Massacre.

A "future war series" was the type of story most requested in a 2000AD poll, and Gerry Finley-Day came up with Rogue

Trooper. It's been an extremely popular feature, despite the fact that it's little more than a war story with a few embellishments. Art so far has been by Mike Dorey, Dave Gibbons, and New Zealander Colin Wilson. Dorey's art is the workmanlike stuff of which most British comics are made, whereas Gibbons' storytelling expertise on the first few instalments provides an interesting contrast to the wonderfully stylish but often confusing art of Wilson.

ACE TRUCKING COMPANY (232-237, 239 on)

Never being slow to pick up on a trend, five weeks before CB radio was legalised in Britain 2000AD premiered this series about a space trucking company, using updated CB dialogue, which was explained in the detachable 'Space Truckers Dictionary' over a period of four weeks.

Ace Garo (who resembles the Impossible Man) runs a spaceship that he'll use to transport anything from A to B for the right price. He has a crew of two, GBH, a huge hulk of a creature who believes himself to be dead (although it hasn't been explained why), and engineer Feek, a

skeletal creature fond of eating insects.

The series has been written in tandem by Alan Grant and John Wagner, under the alias of Grant Grover, and has been very enjoyable, apart from the compulsory CB language which, despite being the reason for the series, is irritatingly incomprehensible at times. Art has been by Belardinelli and Gibson.

ABELARD SNAZZ (189, 190, 209, 237, 238, 245, 254)

Although not a series per se, Abelard Snazz, the genius with the two-storey brain, appears every now and then. Having two brains (and two pairs of eyes -- a particularly jarring artistic effect), Snazz is the man to contact when you've got problems. However, his solutions have a way of going wrong, such as his robot police being so efficient that they arrest people for breaking the laws of grammar and etiquette, so that robot criminals have to be created to occupy their time. Unfortunately, too many humans are caught between police and criminals, so that it becomes necessary to introduce robot innocent bystanders... In the end, the planet had to be evacuated. That was the first Snazz story.

Snazz brings out the lunatic side of writer Alan Moore's usually blacker than black humour. Every story so far has been utterly preposterous and extremely funny.

Once 2000AD had been created, Pat Mills stepped down from the editor's post to return to freelance writing. The editorship was assumed by Kelvin Gosnell, who had worked on the comic since the start as part of the editorial staff. When he felt that there was too much interference from above with regard to his running of the comic, he resigned, to be replaced by his sub-editor, Steve McManus, who does not seem to have any problems with his superiors. In fact, 2000AD is probably the most democratically run comic on the British market. Although, as editor, Steve McManus bears ultimate responsibility for the contents, and catches all the flak, most decisions are made by the office staff as a whole, and suggestions are welcome from anyone. As well as the editor and his assistant, the comic also has an art editor who is responsible for the general look of the comic, and designing the covers. The first art editor was Jan Shepherd who, among other things, was the person who designed the distinctive Judge Dredd logo. When she left, around prog 60, Kevin O'Neill filled the position, and the current art editor, Robin Smith, took over when O'Neill went freelance.

General editorial policy on 2000AD has always been very liberal, as can be assessed from the diverse selection of strips that have appeared in the comic. However, things have been forced on occasion. The impending merger with Starlord forced a 12-week suspension for Robo-Hunter, and Project Overkill was considerably shortened when Tornado collapsed into 2000AD.

It was also considerably harder to pick suitable 2000AD material from Tornado than it had been from Starlord. Blackhawk was drastically altered in order to conform, and Captain Klep (chosen because it only ran for a page) was serialised.

In general, new strips are introduced in 'boom' issues, in which two or three new strips or revivals are phased in at the same time. This has caused problems, with a glut of Future Shocks and Robo-Tales appearing when a strip has finished early, and it was responsible for the Time-Quake story, which ran in 2000AD prior to a boom issue. More recently, there have been a succession of deadline problems, leading to strips stopping and starting, and an abundance of Future Shocks to fill in the gaps, but this was never a deliberate policy.

The production and format of 2000AD started along the lines of most British comics, although it was noticeable that the covers followed the American tradition of showcasing a story featured inside, rather than the usual British standby of starting a strip off on the front cover like Iron Man #23 (although Dan Dare was started on the cover in Progs 46-58). The covers have developed from rather sketchy pieces of art, often with a white background, to full cover illustrations that look all the better for their lack of a UPC box. Progs 1-109 were printed by letterpress on traditional tatty British comics paper, which resembles the interior paper used by DC and Marvel. When a web-offset machine became available, 2000AD Progs 110-126 were printed on that. As well as requiring better quality paper, it enabled the artists working in colour on the covers and centre-spreads to produce some stunning work. Carlos Ezquerra's Strontium Dog centrespreads were regarded as a real challenge by the colour separators. The process cost more though, and when Tornado's cancellation led to a spare letterpress machine, 2000AD returned to the old format, and has remained stable ever since.

The strips that have appeared in 2000AD have showcased an exceptional variety of ideas, with any number of alternate futures being created. However, there hasn't been an attempt to create a cohesive 2000AD timeline, or to preserve any sense of a 2000AD universe along Marvel lines, although there have been instances of continuity, mostly humorous. When any 2000AD character wants a strong drink, he gets Mac-Mac, and in the same prog that a robot named Call Me Kenneth was menacing Judge Dredd, a robot named Call Me Patrick was seen serving Dan Dare tea. The only serious tying-in of separate strips, apart from the use of the Volgans as enemies in Invasion and Hammerstein's War Memoirs, and straightforward sequels, occurred when the son of Giant (from Harlem's Heroes and Inferno) was seen graduating from the Judge's Academy in Judge Dredd.

Features other than strips have also appeared. Most regular characters and villains have featured as back page pin-ups, and there have also been series of pin-ups (such as Kev O'Neill's 7 Wonders of the Universe), and parts which build up into a larger poster over a period of weeks. Games with their boards similarly assembled have also appeared; the first was an extremely impressive board game based on Judge Dredd's trip across the Cursed Earth, and the second was a Flesh card game.

The reasons for the success of 2000AD (in simplified terms) are that it is always inventive, never predictable, has a high standard of story and art, and has rarely attempted to write down to the level of the children who form most of its audience. The Fantastic Four may be the world's greatest comic book, but there is no doubt that the galaxy's greatest comic is 2000AD.

2000AD is obviously available weekly in any British newsagent, but no-one regularly imports the comic to the speciality comic shops in the USA. Apparently, the reason is that distributors aren't geared to handle a weekly comic (although they seem to have little trouble in coping with weekly shipments from Marvel and DC), and even selling 4 consecutive issues monthly in a plastic bag proved to be too complex. It would seem that for American readers, the only way to change the minds of your distributors into importing 2000AD is to write en masse.

I would like to thank Robin Smith, art editor of 2000AD, for the time and help that he has given me in researching this article.

-FRANK PLOWRIGHT

THE PLANET WAS SMALL, SPARSELY POPULATED AND DENSELY FOLIATED, SO OUR SENSORS TOLD US. NOT EXACTLY SEDUCTIVE BUT IT DIDN'T SEEM TOO HOSTILE EITHER, WHICH WAS ALL RIGHT BY ME!

PLEASE HURRY, GENTLEMEN. THIS EBIDEMIC OB COLDS IS AFFECTING MORALE. AND IF CABTAIN RUSSELL HADN'T LOST HIS VOICE HE'D BE URGING HASTE TOO!

WE'LL DO OUR BEST, COMMODORE.

THAT'S RIGHT -- AFTER COUNTLESS PERILS ON A DOZEN ALIEN WORLDS, ALMOST ALL THE CONQUEROR'S CREW HAD BEEN DOWNED BY A PECULIARLY VIRULENT STRAIN OF... *THE COMMON COLD!*

"MVS. CONQUEROR,"

COLD CURE

BY PAUL ALEXANDER

FEATURING CHARACTERS CREATED BY MARTIN LOCK AND DAVE HARWOOD

GUESS WHO ESCAPED INFECTION?

I JUST HOPE WE CAN FIND SOME LYXALIA ROOTS ROUND HERE, FRANCIS!

THE SPIKY LITTLE DEVILS ARE FAIRLY COMMON IN THIS SECTOR - IN THIS TYPE OF CLIMATE ESPECIALLY. LET'S LOOK UNDER THE TREES FIRST.

Flying Hedge

LXALIA SAP IS, OF COURSE, THE BEST CURE FOR THE COMMON COLD WE'VE YET DISCOVERED.

LOOK! A WHOLE CLUSTER! HEY, THIS MUST BE MY YEAR'S QUOTA OF LUCK

UHH...

C'MON, LUKE...

BLOP! BLOP! BLOP!

GROWWL!

...LUKE? ..gulp...

..UHHH... *BIG*, ISN'T IT?

YEAH, LIEUTENANT, BIG. KNOW WHAT I LIKE ABOUT THIS JOB ?

NOPE.

WELL, THAT MAKES TWO OF US!

I'D HAVE GIVEN A MONTH'S PAY THEN FOR A NICE TENSE NERVOUS HEADACHE, A SORE THROAT AND A BLOCKED-UP NOSE BACK ABOARD SHIP...

...AND SINCE THERE'S TOO MUCH VIOLENCE AROUND AS IT IS, LET'S FIND OUT JUST WHAT *WAS* HAPPENING...

..ON BOARD THE CONQUEROR

COMMODORE JENKINS, WE'VE LOST CONTACT WITH THE LANDING PARTY!

WHAD?!? YOU'RE CERTAIN?

THERE ARE NO LIFE-FORMS IN THAT AREA NOW, SIR. SHALL I ASSEMBLE A SEARCH PARTY?

A-A-ATCHOO! GO AHEAD, LIEUDENANT. WE *DO* NEED THAD LYXALIA ROOT.. AND TO FIND FRANC AND LUKE OF COURSE.

ISN'T IT *NICE* HAVING PEOPLE CARE ABOUT YOU?

PERMISSION TO GO WITH THE SEARCH PARTY, SIR?

DENIED, LIEUDENANT. NO POINT IN RISKING THE LIBES OF BLUE COMMAND ON A JOB THE ENLISTED MEN CAN DO PERFECTLY WELL.

HISS TIK

GO DOWD TO SIGBAY AND INFORM CABTAIN RUSSELL OF THE SITUATION.

YES, COMMODORE.

AND WHILE YOU'RE THERE GED ME ANOTHER UNID OF COUCH MIXTURE!

SSSS

POOR OLD FLUFF! BUT SHE'LL GET HER OWN WAY, JUST WATCH...

ISOLATION CAPT RUSSELL

..AND SO THE DECISION ON WHO GOES WITH THE SEARCH PARTY RESTS WITH YOU--

NOT THE COMMODORE.

I NATURALLY..APPRECIATE..HIS CONCERN. BUT PLEASE DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T GO, CAPTAIN.

THANK YOU, CAPTAIN RUSSELL! I KNEW YOU'D UNDERSTAND.

SEE WHAT I MEAN?

2.

WELL? A-A-ATCHOO! WELL, WHAT DID HE SAY?

HE DIDN'T SAY NO...!

COME ON, THEN! AATCHOO! GOT A HANDKERCHIEF, FL'FF?

SORRY, I THREW THEM ALL AWAY. I SHOULD BE IMMUNE TO COLDS AT THE MOMENT, AFTER THE ONE I HAD ON LISELLA.*

HANGAR AIRLOCK 3

*BEM #35 — Martin.

THE CONQUEROR CREW--EVEN THE ALL-COUGHING, ALL-SNEEZING VERSIONS--ARE STILL THE MOST EFFICIENT IN THE NAVY. SO, VERY SOON...

THE SHUTTLE'S BEEN CRUSHED!

WHAT COULD'VE DONE THAT?

Conqueror Transport

GROWL

SILLY QUESTION. FORGET I ASKED...

NO SHOOTING! THAT WOMAN'S UNARMED!

SHE DOESN'T *NEED* TO BE ARMED. SHE JUST NEEDS TO POINT TO US AND SAY 'LUNCH' TO THAT EARTHWORM WITH DENTURES SHE'S RIDING!

NO, LOOK; SHE'S GESTURING FOR US TO FOLLOW HER.

I THINK WE SHOULD.

SHE'S PROBABLY LEADING US TO HER SETTLEMENT.

I'D ASSUME THE SAME THING HAPPENED TO FRANK AND LUKE.

WELL, I HOPE HER CULTURE HAS INVENTED THE -ATCHOO!- PAPER TISSUE.

THIS PLACE LOOKS LIKE A PRISON CAMP!

YES. I THINK THIS WHOLE PLANET IS AN ANCIENT, FORGOTTEN PENAL COLONY, AND THESE WOMEN THE DESCENDANTS OF THE ORIGINAL PRISONERS.

BUT WHERE ARE FRANK AND LUKE? AND WHY ARE THERE NO MEN ON THIS SETTLEMENT?

I DON'T KNOW. BUT I THINK WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT.

AND FLUFFY IS RARELY WRONG IN SUCH MATTERS.

SO....

IT'S NO GOOD, KATH. I CAN'T MAKE THEM OR THEIR QUEEN UNDERSTAND WHAT WE'RE HERE FOR. I'D SEND FOR A LANGUAGE COMPUTER, BUT THEY SEEM TOTALLY MUTE.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN, LIEUTENANT.

LUKE!

ALL RIGHT, CORPORAL, JUST WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON?

ER...WELL, FROM WHAT I CAN MAKE OUT -AND THESE PEOPLE DON'T TALK MUCH, THEY USE A KIND OF...*BODY* LANGUAGE -ALL THEIR MEN WERE RECENTLY ABDUCTED...

..BY ALIEN SLAVE TRADERS, AND TO ...PROPAGATE THEIR SPECIES, THEY KIDNAPPED US --TO BREED WITH...

WE'VE BEEN RESISTING!

SLIGHTLY.

SO I SEE.

C'MON, KATH, LET'S SEE ABOUT RESOLVING ALL THIS.

AND RESOLVED IT WAS. THE CREW WERE CURED, AND FL'FF'S COMPUTER LOCATED THE SLUG WOMEN'S HOME WORLD...

WHO AGREED TO TAKE THEM BACK, PROVIDED WE LAY ON THE TRANSPORT

HANGAR DECK

SO LIFE ABOARD THE CONQUEROR RETURNED TO NORMAL.

SIGH!

Oh, COME ON, FLUFFY! THE DRINKS THEY GAVE US MUST HAVE BEEN DRUGGED!

KATH, DON'T BE LIKE THIS, WOMAN!

OR WOULD DO... GIVEN ENOUGH TIME!

OPEN UP!

ENSIGN K

YOU DON'T THINK WE ENJOYED IT, DO YOU?

END.

Reaction

Margaret O'Connell

Bem #35's cover interview was surprisingly interesting, considering that I'd never had the opportunity of reading anything that Pat Mills had written -- a problem which was neatly eliminated by the "Making of Nemesis" article later in the same issue, complete with a reprint of the entire 4-page story of Nemesis' visit to Uncle Baal. (If 2000AD had more strips like this particular example, instead of an endless array of futuristic pseudo-war comics in which characterization consists of Judge Dredd refusing to scream when tortured, or Sam Slade, Robo-Hunter, getting a mechanical talking cigar that makes inane remarks in a stage-Spanish accent, I might actually be tempted to buy it on my periodic visits to Forbidden Planet's store in New York.) Of course, it would have been a better idea to put the Nemesis piece right after the interview, instead of twenty pages away, or to at least give non-habitués of 2000AD a chance to read the sample of Mills' work first by mentioning its presence in the introduction to the interview, but I suppose bridges across the Atlantic are not built in a day.

Actually, what I found most striking about the interview was Pat Mills' contemptuous attitude towards "Paddy McGinty's Goat", which he held up as the ultimate example of why JET was "appalling" and "puke-making". Judging by the other strips he describes, the magazine as a whole really must have been pretty sickening, but compared to something like the series Mills himself did for JET about the cop who solves crimes by being able to tell the difference between different kinds of trees, the concept of a shape-shifting alien who disguises itself as a pet goat sounds positively reasonable. It could even be rather charming, in a sort of off-the-wall way, at least if it were handled properly. (Presumably it wasn't -- the final panel reproduced here certainly betrays more than a hint of cloying sentimentality.)

Personally, when I was reading all those girls' comics weeklies Kathleen Glancy sent me (I've done a series of articles about them for LoC, as well as the "Steed and Peel Investigate" piece for last issue's Bem), I found that the token E. Nesbit-type "girl-meets-guardian angel/robot/ghost and/or discovers magical artifact" strip which almost every title contained was more likely than not to be the only redeeming feature of whatever comic it happened to appear in. I find it intriguing that the people who produce British comics seem to assume that children (or at least little girls -- there don't seem to be any whimsical fantasy strips of this kind in current, post-JET British boys' comics, judging from the few that I've seen) are interested in this sort of thing as a matter of course, whereas American comics creators' idea of the kind of fantasy kids (as well as

older readers) are interested in almost invariably involves superheroes. This may have something to do with what appears to be the greater acceptability to the average (child) British comics reader (as opposed to the average full-fledged British fan) of comics that are overtly child-oriented -- i.e., with child heroes, and "childish" themes involving school, more or less traditional fairy tale-type characters, and/or an emphasis on the problem of being small and powerless and at the mercy of adults (the girls' papers are full of stories about wicked stepmothers, cruel guardians, and exploitative aunts and uncles). Superhero comics, on the other hand, are generally about adult protagonists--though the otherwise inexplicable enthusiasm over undistinguished teenage characters like Firestorm and Kitty Pryde, especially among younger fans, seems to indicate that under certain circumstances, at least, juvenile superhero fans are not only willing, but eager, to read about super-powered people who are their own age or only a little older. Although their typically soap-operatic subplots often make the allegedly adult heroes seem even more immature than the Archie gang, especially when it comes to romance, superhero comics also usually have as their major themes distinctly non-childish and often literally earth-shattering problems like righting wrongs on a grand scale, bringing master criminals to justice, and saving the world (or at least the city) from the menace of the month.

My impression is that in the U.S.A., children who read comics often actually start out with the supposedly more "grown-up" superhero titles, and, especially if they are boys, never have anything to do with the more overtly child- or teenage-oriented comics (e.g. Harveys, the Disney funny animal comics, and Archies) at all. The fact that in Britain many more explicitly juvenile comics seem to exist as a significant part of the mainstream market, and even to have a sort of quasi-fandom of their own (all those nine and ten year olds who write in to the letters pages seeking pen pals and so on), suggests that, unlike in America, most British children do not consider this kind of comic shamefully babyish and the kind of thing nobody over the age of eight should be caught dead reading. (What British comics fans -- of whatever age -- think is another story.)

Of course, the most overtly "childish" British comics--i.e. the girls' weeklies (many of the so-called boys' weeklies, such as WARLORD, being merely essentially American-style war comics)--seem to have the ultimate effect of permanently alienating their audience from comics of any sort, as evidenced by the fact that there are so few British female fans. Obviously then, this more openly juvenile approach also has major drawbacks, especially when it's used as an excuse to churn out endless interchangeably inane stories about Victorian orphan ballerinas and gymnastic stars. I do think, though, that the more well-done Nesbitish fantasy stories (the ones usually in which sorcery is played for laughs, not soap opera) are a much-needed, refreshing change of pace from the more standard mainstream power fantasies about omnipotent adults who save the world twice a week. But then, I read SABRINA THE TEEN-AGE WITCH...

I thought Bem #35 was quite good on the whole, especially the hilarious Katholicity (which made me laugh out loud) and the article explaining the British comic market, which shed light on a lot of things I'd been vaguely puzzled by, like the weeklies' exhortations to "reserve your copy now!" I had always assumed that these were just empty hype, since asking a newsstand proprietor in the U.S.A. to take the trouble of saving you a copy of something would merely provoke loud guffaws and snorts of derision.

There are a few more things I'd like to know, though--for example, how normal is it to read comics in Britain? (For children, I mean--the "would you read a comic on the bus?" debate in Reaction a few issues ago made it clear that it's no more socially acceptable for adults there than it is here.) As you probably already know from my article in LoC #5, in the neighbourhood in New York City where I grew up, hardly any of the kids seemed to read them at all, and I'm pretty sure none of the other girls did. Of course, my neighbourhood seems to have been somewhat atypical, at least compared to the places where most of the other fans I know grew up, but my general impression is that there just aren't that many kids in the U.S.A. any more who routinely read comics unless they're actually hardcore fans -- whether because of the lingering influence of Wertham or because they'd rather watch TV, I don't know. This goes double for those titles that are perceived as being overtly childish (i.e., just about anything but the superhero books). Judging by the number of different boys' and girls' weeklies you seem to have in Britain, though, reading non-superhero comics must be something the average kid --even the average girl--is fairly willing to do until around the age of ten or twelve (as opposed to maybe eight at the most here). Of course, these are fairly shaky grounds for drawing any sort of conclusions--after all, we have all those Archie titles over here, too, even though hardly anyone but LoC contributors seems to read them, so far as I know.

Is it just my imagination, or does Zirk, Silver Sweater of the Spaceways, in WARRIOR #3 behave suspiciously like a sterling silver piggy-bank version of Thundermole?

/(He behaves suspiciously, period. But to move back a paragraph, I collect the Archie digests--does that mean that I've got to become a LoC contributor? -ML)/

Unfortunately, Margaret's letter was the only one received from America -- have some others got lost between the various N.M.P. addresses? But luckily the delay in getting this issue published means that letters from British regulars have had time to arrive...

David Gryc

Ah, yet another issue of Fantasy Advertiser. (He slowly turns over the envelope, and arg!, there from beneath the plastic cover stares Bem 35! He collapses, shock reverberating through his system. Slowly, he makes it to a chair and, with hands shaking, opens the envelope...)

The new, all different, all American sized Bem. I really don't know if I like it. Okay, the same old magic <u>was</u> there, squashed in between the letters, but overall the zine had indeed lost the fannishness of its previous issues. Arg! Can it be true, can the legendary Bem have lost its appeal? But wait, what is this...Reaction, gasp, Americanized, and there are all the same old faces. Nostalgia returns; Katholicity, beautiful, and Sigh, ah, Keith Williams, what can I say--British at its best! H.M.S. Conqueror too, this is too much, oh my gosh, Fan-Things, Thundermole...gasp, Pat Mills...mumble, Nemesis... urg...Danger! Thrill power overload! Thrill power overload! Critical! /(Hey, somebody take that Bem away from him... -Martin)/

Ahem. Anyway, I think Bem was worth the wait. I'm not sure I like the paper that New Media are using; too thin, making Bem look thinner than it is. But, I say, but, this is my only quibble with Bem-35, apart from that over-reacting in your editorial. (You mean you weren't?)

Margaret O'Connell and Howard P. Siegal are very good writers, and I always enjoy their work. Maggi (I may call you Maggi, Margaret?) was beautiful as usual. You know, I was laughing after 3 sentences, but when I showed my sister, there wasn't a titter, let alone a laugh. Maybe I shouldn't have got her to read the X-Men! (Far too subtle.) Let alone the Wolverine mini-series -- which for me was my favourite comic for 4 months. Sigh...I shall look forward to the wedding.

You know, I don't think Frank Miller will have much fannish appeal after going to DC, but we'll see. And what's the betting that it will have something to do with The Batman? I can tell you now I'm buying as many DCs as Marvels these days, and if Marvel continue on the downward trend that's already taken hold of many of their comics, I'll soon be getting more DCs than Marvels, an all-time first for me!

Do watch your American slant. Don't let it overpower Bem--after all, this is a British zine originally. I guess we can expect an even bigger Reaction with fans from America. Do let us know what sort of response you get from America. I shall definitely look for reviews of Bem in the American zines I get.

In reply to Graeme Bassett, the name is said "GRICK", as in, yeah, well, you get the idea.

Graeme Bassett

The coincidence which eventually brought Mr Graeme Bassett out of retirement and persuaded him to write one more LoC occurred on a cold week in October when three old favourites made a sudden reappearance: "Smiley's People", "Take Three Women", and Bem. Was this mere coincidence, he wondered? Certainly it all seems innocent. "Daffy, debby" Martin, "Hard-headed" Keith, and "Hopelessly optimistic" Kath hardly seem to have changed in the years since we saw them last.

But the "Plump, bespectacled spymaster" couldn't let it rest as easy as that. He persevered, flicking through their long-forgotten writings, tearing doggedly through the dusty past in search of The Mole. Yet while he, and other Thundermole fans, ploughed on to the back page, wondering if the Editor had forgotten who the star of Bem was, the ex-Lamplighter Dave Harwood sat back comfortably in his exclusive Gallery selling forged comics to the masses.

Dave's article on "Ghosts" was interesting, although I wish he had widened his sights to include Bill Sienkiewicz in his article. After all, here we have the opposite of a ghost...a man making his name by copying the style of others. His recent venture into Kaluta-land is, to my eyes, much more successful than his foray into Adams territory. Dave's the artist, so he can probably give us a technical explanation. Perhaps it's because Adams' style is to do with guts, observation and integrity, while Kaluta is easily-copied surface effect. Then again, maybe it's just that Kaluta and Sinky Bill have funny names.

"Sigh" lived up to its name again. Exasperation rules. If you asked Roy Thomas, he'd probably ramble on about comics being the lineal descendants of ancient myth. Sounds good enough to me. Comics are just myths. Every so often, someone comes along and tells a new story which conflicts with an old story. If the new story is good, you just accept the contradiction, and add it to the mythos. If not, you ignore it. The twin Earths are a part of that mythos. They can spawn great tales: "Flash of Two Worlds", and just about anything recently written for Batman by Alan Brennert. They can also spawn rubbish such as the annual JLA/JSA bunfight. Attempts to tie the DC "Universe" together, using the twin Earths, are amusing, but should be kept in their place. Taken seriously they can cause acute mental damage.

The interview was excellent. Pat Mills came across as a much nicer person than I'd imagined. What a pity that you didn't discuss "Charley's War" at greater length. In my humble opinion it's far better than any of Mills' fantasy work; IPC apparently share this view, actually unveiling a human face at the same time by postponing the strip while artist Joe Colquhoun was ill.

Theo Clarke

How pleasant to see Bem again, after such a long absence. Presumably the quarterly schedule will run normally now that the ball is rolling again.

I am sure that Ruan's article on British comics will be of interest to your American readers. It was

informative and accurate, but then that is only to be expected.

I was fascinated by the interview with Pat Mills. It made a change to see someone with a good word for the girls' comics. Obviously Pat has a vested interest, but it is rare to find anyone who is prepared to take comics on their own level: ephemeral entertainment for youngsters. It is true that most British girls' comics are fearfully patronising, but there are high points which get overlooked amid the dross. It does not help matters when quality is not maintained even within a single story, so it is difficult to recommend particular titles to those who might be interested--however, the general standard of art in the girls' comics is quite high, so there is scope for improvement should the attitudes to the writing change.

This rather spirited defence of BUNTY and company does not mean that I disagree with Margaret O'Connell's witty comments on her experience of them, but I do feel that such comics must be too alien to be appreciated on most levels by those without a considerable understanding of British culture and the origins of our comics. It is easy to forget that our comics developed from the penny papers of the last century, and these fell into three distinct categories. There were the boys' papers like CHUMS and BOYS' OWN PAPER, which were aimed at middle class schoolboys with a yen to join the armed forces or promote the benefits of Empire throughout the land; these proclaimed the classic English virtues of sportsmanship and valour. For the under-elevens, there were the likes of THE PRIZE and CHATTERBOX, which extolled honesty and hard work to the impressionable young. Finally, there were the girls' papers which were firmly directed at young women in search of a husband or newly married. It is clear that little of value could develop from such roots, and we can only hope that a radical change will sweep British comics -- perhaps 2000AD is a precursor of such a movement.

I was surprised to learn how many pros had come up through Charlton, although Howard shocked me with his assertion that there was little to influence John Byrne in Britain because the only American comics available were the black & white reprints. So what? Frank Bellamy was making coloured smudges on the pages of Eagle which some

Unenlightened individuals like myself consider to be quite sophisticated comic art, and there were a number of British strips appearing in the old boys' papers, not to mention the early boys' comics like TIGER and LION. However, none of this seems terribly significant in the light of Byrne's tender age during this period. I do not believe that artists develop many significant influences when they are under eight, but perhaps I underestimate the impact of the experiences of childhood.

Dale Coe does not stand much chance of getting control of Marvel now that he has revealed to the world that he would get rid of two of their most marketable characters: namely Spider-Man and Hulk. I have been enjoying SPIDER-MAN recently, although I am somewhat dubious about the merits of having Debbie (is that her name?) guessing his secret identity. I cannot see anything new developing from the scenario. The same can be said for the similar events in CAPTAIN AMERICA, but that title has sunk so low that there is little that could be done to harm it further.

I disagree that a character cannot be hurt if he or she cannot be touched. In a universe where so many characters have mental powers, and where characters are generally only matched against approximate equals, physical invulnerability is not too great a defense. This is especially true of the X-Men, where the Professor acts as a lure to most mentally superpowered villains.

Kathleen Glancy is quite right to be angered by the myth that all women long for motherhood. However, a significant proportion of women do see motherhood as a rather desirable form of fulfilment, although I suspect that this attitude is self-perpetuating and probably arises as much from the rather common male yearning for parenthood as from any inherent female urge to breed. Of course, it must be said that those of us who have no desire to extend the sway of homo sapiens are abnormal from a biological standpoint. After all, the only valid attitude biologically is to desire to maintain one's own species --and those of us who wish to remain child-free are a genetic cul-de-sac. This is certainly the view of the medical fraternity in this country: they refuse to sterilize individuals in my age group, i.e. under 35, on the grounds that it is irreversible and that too many people change their minds as it is. Presumably they do have a point there, but it still irks me.

Joe Mills seems to be interested in illustrated stories, not comics. A good story can be badly illustrated, but a comic with poor art is a poor comic. Perhaps this is merely a matter of semantics?

Katholicity raised a smile, so it must have succeeded -- unless a Bizarro humour piece should aim to depress the reader, which seems likely...

Dave Harwood's article on ghosting was erudite and interesting. This is just the kind of article that I like to see in zines. It is a shame that so few people have either the knowledge or the application to produce them.

Graeme Bassett's review of the Bond comic shows how reviews should be written --a witty hook, constructive criticism, and an intelligent use of parallels. ARAK

is an interesting comic: the quasi-historical environment gives it a structure that most sword-and-sorcery lacks (usually because it would take so long to describe the background to such tales adequately, and sword & sorcery is an aspect of pulp fiction, rather than any more verbose literary form). No doubt the historical errors will come to irritate me, but at present it remains fun.

The problem that Keith W. Williams appears to be banging his little bespectacled head against (in Sigh...) is that all comics face a temporal dilemma in that the main characters can never age significantly and must remain contemporary. This arises from closely related clauses: any commercial comic must be intended to run forever (the longer a title continues the greater its stable market, as newer generations of readers are introduced to the comic by older readers or ex-readers, and the greater its potential for marketing ploys such as Spider-Man costumes), but its readers must be able to relate to the stories if they are to continue to buy it regularly. Historical stories or those set in a fantastic milieu such as Hyperborea are accessible if the period is defined or the environment is consistent, but to have frozen the original Marvel heroes in the sixties would have made them dated and passé -- and few publishers would dare to sit out the lean years until a title picked up nostalgia sales! Consequently, the circumstances of the stories must develop in line with current events. However, if the characters were to age at the same rate, a successful comic would eventually face the problems inherent in dealing with characters who have passed their physical or mental prime, and who must ultimately die, which is fine for the supporting cast but would make it rather difficult for the target audience to relate to a hero very much older than themselves -- would Spider-Man be so popular if our hero was coping with the problems associated with late middle age? Clearly, there is no "realistic" solution to this dilemma, and we must accept the inevitable use of dual temporal development or reject long-standing commercial comics on principle.

I continue to enjoy H.M.S. Conqueror, and admire Eddie's versatility enormously. A very sophisticated strip--and I am well aware that it is unnecessary to ask you not to stop!

Keith's FF epic was delightful and, despite the dear lad's usual scathing tone, a rational approach to what could easily have developed into a smugly destructive article. It is always amusing to read Keith's rantings and find that he is keeping things in perspective--it is akin to shouting "I am not angry".

Thundermole was scrappy and has lost direction. I only hope that it will recover, or fails to orientate itself to such an extent that it cannot find future issues at all. Preferably the former.

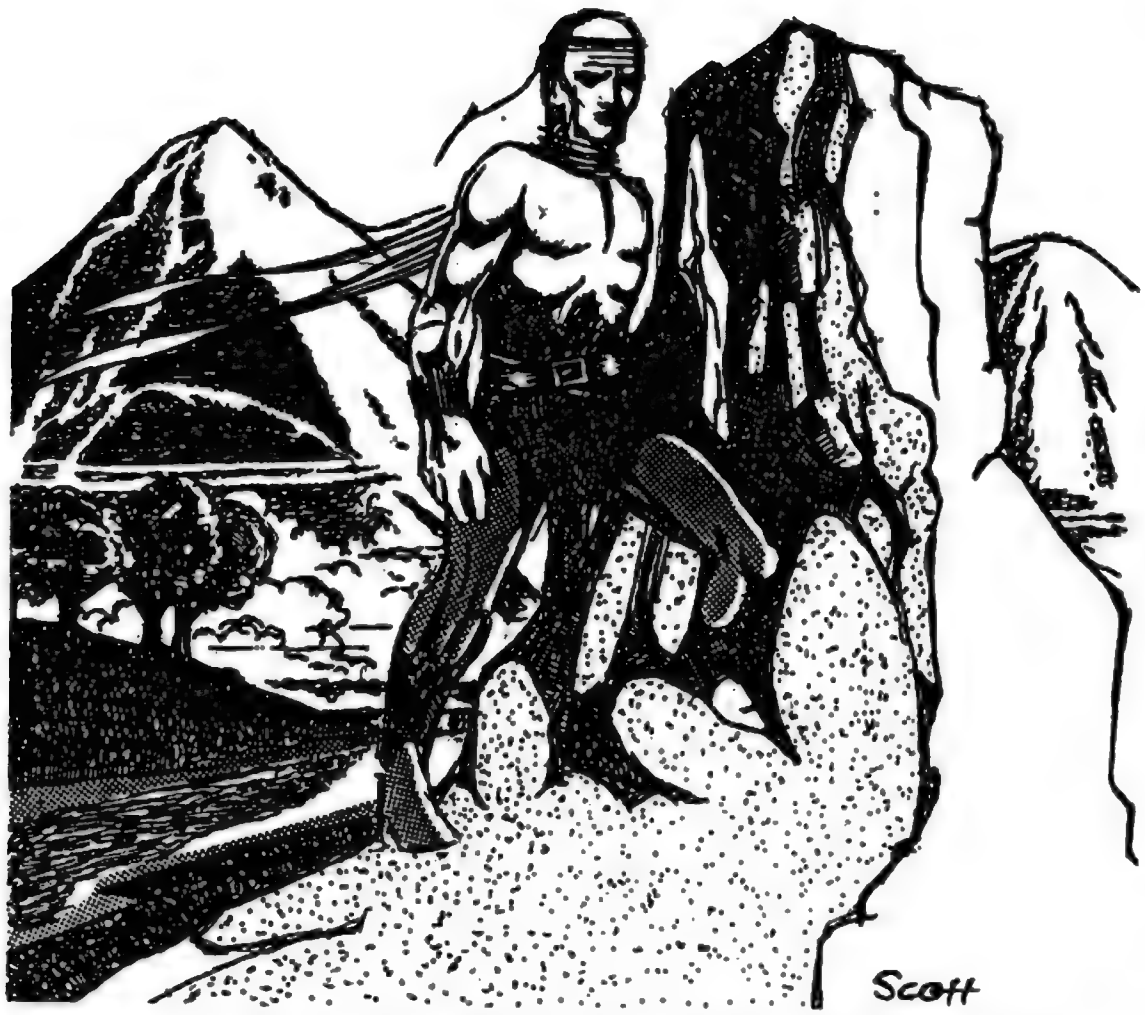
The real gem in this issue has to be Adam Pirani's remarkable account of the development of Nemesis. Quite simply this is one of the most enjoyable items that I have ever seen in any fanzine. To me it succeeded on every level, and I am at a loss to convey my enthusiasm... so I shall give up!

John Dalzell — So here is the long awaited American Bem, and to tell you the truth, it was a bit of an anticlimax. I was not pleased with the idea when I first heard of it, and now that I have seen it, some of my fears were well-founded. Let me elucidate:

1. The American format. Do we really want Bem to be printed on the same size and type of paper as the other fanzines published in America, and with the same glossy cover? Surely this only helps to take away the distinctiveness of Bem as a publication? This is even more relevant since part of the change is to put Bem under the noses of every comic fan in America. I think it looks too slick, when it was perfectly adequate as a fanzine. I am sure they have heard of A4 in Florida, and even if they have not, the printers are not inflexible.

2. American ads. I resent being asked my Zip Code in a publication that is supposedly British. I notice that all the full-pagers are house ads for New Media, and I hope that is not going to happen again. Whatever percentage of the total circulation that side of the Atlantic constitutes, you must remember that your first duty is to the British fan.

3. Over-emphasis on British comics. Under a quarter of the last British Bem (excluding Reaction and the comic strips) was devoted to the products of this country, whereas over a third of this issue was devoted to them. I hope that it will not be a continuing trend, but merely to familiarise the new audience with our comic scene. I hear shouts of "But this is a British fanzine, there should be lots on our comics"--but British fanzines do not principally deal with British comics because British comics are principally dreadful. It is a worrying trend, because it would seem that Bem would then be catering for the American audience only interested in 2000AD. This tendency also leads to the ridiculous spectacle of an article on British girls' comics in Bem, which was not even funny as a joke and if ever repeated will result in the immediate cancelling of my subscription. TWINKLE, indeed.



4. Risk of delays. How long did we have to wait for this issue of Bem? What guarantees are there that it will not be repeated, or that further increases in price will not suddenly take place? Can you trust New Media?

What it boils down to is: Should the number one British fanzine be made in America? I would rather have Rolls-Royce make their cars in Outer Mongolia. I presume that the delay was responsible for the chronically short Bem news bit, all of which was devoted to British news. I hope the revival of Fantasy Advertiser does not mean that Bem is no longer "the comics news fanzine".

And now onto the actual contents of the issue under consideration. The interview with Pat Mills was as uninteresting as I would have expected it to be, despite the man's talent, which shines through the hackery he subjects himself to from time to time. What amazed me was the man's complete ignorance of American comics; I could accept the fact that he had not heard of Frank Miller, who is after all only the most accomplished and popular exponent of Pat Mills' chosen profession in the world, but to have never heard of Daredevil at all after 18 years of continuous publication...

There was one part of this issue which I thoroughly enjoyed, and that I am still laughing at after several reads; Keith Williams' wonderful piece on the first issue of FANTASTIC FOUR. Sigh is usually the best regular column in Bem, and it was like having an extra-long Sigh. Excellent. I hope "Looking Back With Hindsight" will be a regular feature, and that you will not let Glancy get her hands on it. She really is a very silly person with a wonderful flair for writing sordid, trivial and unfunny articles. Bizarro-Kathleen would probably be tolerant, charming, modest, et cetera.

How about a decent logo for Bem, or is that now the responsibility of the senator for Florida?

Until Steve Englehart gets the Nobel prize for literature: Make mine TWINKLE! (The threat stands.)

/(Plenty of answers required. Even in Britain, the A4 format was unwieldy for distribution, and to insist on it for America would have been sure to put up the price. Being in the "normal" fanzine format should help Bem to be recognized as a fanzine in America.

/(2. No problem: the ad rate for Bem is $60 to New Media, or, for Britain, £35 to me--check with me or them for ad deadlines, etc, as appropriate.

/(3. The proportion of Bem given over to different types of material varies from issue to issue, and you'd find for example Bem-29 to be very different in its emphasis from Bem-30. However, it would be silly not to use our ease of access to British professionals to the best advantage. I'm sorry that one-third of a page devoted to girls' comics, with the emphasis on how it might discourage girls from becoming comics fans, had such a bad effect on you, but I refuse to let such "blackmail" dictate what can go into Bem. But then, you didn't say you'd want your money back...

/(4. Oops. I hope the situation will improve. Bem needed to expand, I could not afford to publish it, and this did seem the only possible way to do it and bring Bem to the wider readership I feel its contributors deserve. For the comics news (for Britain), the torch has indeed now been passed to F/A, which is both cheaper and more regular than Bem, and fully British-produced. -Martin)/

Lew Stringer

I bought a copy of Bem #35 at the last Birmingham mart; the price was a bit steep, I thought, especially when one considers that Bem-34 cost only 50p. However, the production and contents of the new issue justified the rise.

Kevin O'Neill's dazzling cover should open the eyes of our American cousins to what a good British artist can produce. Unlike most artists whose work is seen in the States, Kev's stuff isn't influenced by the likes of Neal Adams or Jack Kirby. Although his British influences are slightly evident in the odd places, Kev has developed a strong, original, highly detailed style all his own, and if the Yanks have any sense they will plonk down their $2.50 on the strength of the cover alone.

It's great to see Pat Mills getting some of the recognition he deserves at last. Again, like many artists, most comics writers in the U.S. are heavily influenced by a comics-only diet, but Pat delves into all kinds of reference for his stories. His stuff is of a consistently high standard, and never falls into a clichéd rut. His comments on JET were very amusing -- it was truly one of the worst titles put out by IPC and was launched at a time when IPC seemed to be bringing out a new comic every few weeks! Still, what can you expect from a comic that gave away a free bar of toffee with the first issue? However, to be fair to the rag, JET ran for longer than the 10 weeks Pat said -- it actually published 22 issues in all!!

"The Making of Nemesis The Warlock" was the high spot of the issue for me, and proved how visual Pat's scripts are. Kev's notes and sketches were also very informative, and it was fascinating to find out that Great Uncle Baal was based on Albert Steptoe's voice. "Dirty ol' Warlock!"

The "Comics in Britain" article should give the Americans some idea of how comics operate over here. Plenty of information was packed into the feature, but I think I should point out that WHIZZER AND CHIPS is not really a "merge" comic. It originated in the "2 comics in 1" format from its very first issue in 1969 as a new innovation to attract readers. Obviously, the idea worked as the comic is still going strong today, but other IPC titles which copied this format (SHIVER AND SHAKE and SCORE AND ROAR) didn't last long. There was a comic called CHIPS which ran from 1890 to 1953 (when it merged with FILM FUN), but apart from the title the original had nothing in common with the IPC version.

Keith Williams' dissection of FANTASTIC FOUR #1 was very humorous and actually had me laughing out loud in places. When I'd read the story as a reprint in WHAM! as a child of 7 I took the whole thing straight, but Keith's cold-print analysis had me in stitches. Those early Lee/Kirby strips were melodramatic to ridiculous extremes, and lines such as "Not if I can help it! And help it I can!" will live on in comic book infamy forever.

Keith ended his article on a very interesting point. Marvel do seem to have forgotten that the FF was supposed to be a ground-breaking book, and have let it slip into the mire with all the others. It started to slump in the late sixties/early seventies and hasn't really reached a peak

again. Marvel copped out on the Reed/Sue divorce, and turned a comic which should have been their flagship into one of the most tiresome titles around. Today, John Byrne obviously has a great affection for those early classic issues, and tries to capture the spirit of them in the issues he produces, but somehow it all comes across as very insubstantial. The FANTASTIC FOUR today reminds me very much of a Mars Bar: it has been around so long that it immediately sells on its name, and it is enjoyable but easily forgettable.

Summing up, it's good to see Bem back on the stands, and I hope that NMP keep to a regular schedule now. From your editorial you seem to imply that future issues will concentrate more heavily on u.s. comics. That's COMICS FEATURE's job --let's see Bem take advantage of its editorial position and spotlight British comics.

Dick Domar

I have just spent the whole afternoon reading the new "American" Bem, & I'm impressed. Partly impressed, that is. Lots of pages meant a long read and represents good value for money, but if it's going to contain a lot of out of date stuff... Well, that's a problem you won't have if you get back on schedule.

Anyway, I renewed my subscription to the X-Men Fan Club, purely because it worked out cheaper to subscribe and have an advert in it than paying ten bob more for just an advert and not getting the year's worth of issues. I still hate Kitty Pryde, and one of my fervent desires is to see her killed in the messiest way possible.

It could be done, you know. She isn't intangible all the time, and a sniper could put a high velocity shell right in her face, blowing her face away & mashing her brains into so many little pieces. Isn't that thought just great. Then you could follow up with Wolverine letting fly. Killing and maiming bad guys in a rage. Lots of blood and guts all over the place. That would be the real Wolverine; unrestricted and unrestrained, able to be himself, not the wimp Marvel have him.

Talking of aggro at a comic mart (Mark Dey's LoC), I've had this great idea of smashing up a comic mart. You know, cause mayhem, overturn dealers' tables, throw boxes of rare comics up in the air, at people. Have a riot. It would be good fun and everyone would enjoy themselves--except the dealers of course, and their insurance companies if they have them.

On a more serious subject, Jonah Hex. This is the best comic in the world. It is so good it makes the rest seem bland in comparison. The art is usually of a high standard and sets the western scene perfectly. The stories are well written and thought out, giving you entertainment of the highest calibre. And what more do you want from a comic book? Jonah Hex Rules OK. Oh and another thing, you won't have to pay an arm or a leg for back issues. Not yet, anyway.

Don't you just love the way that Keith Williams gives us a new insight into a particular comic? It's so well done that it gives the impression that no matter which comic he cares to scrutinize, the result would always be the same. That is, the comic would be found to be full of mistakes, et cetera. Me, I couldn't really care less, but I enjoyed the nit-picking of FF #1 nonetheless.

Anyway, I will be looking forward to letters from Yanks that I can take the piss out of. You know, the American equivalent of ~~fitting~~ collectors and comic fans like Mark Day, Stephen Bailey, and others. If on the other hand there are a few nutters like Graeme Bassett, Ben Crozier & Rai Davies about, things could prove to be most interesting.

/(Just as long as there isn't an equivalent to Dick Domar out there... -ML)/

Tom Beament

This issue of Bem didn't quite make it, as Bems go. It was, contentswise, a slightly below average issue, for me; that still makes it a very good read though.

The question is: Was it worth it?

Admittedly, Bem is being printed in America, with one would hope comprehensive distribution in the U.S.A., which means good exposure for the British comics scene (particularly good for WARRIOR -- an article is essential), but I doubt that the British audience is all that happy with current developments, but we shall see.

"The Bem News Service.....comics news from Britain and America" --I couldn't find that much American news, though. Then again, I think that's a good thing, since the U.S. comics fans will already know all the news, and we in Britain have a superb U.S. news service in F/A. The "Comics in Britain" piece was, I guess, more for the American readers--very well written, anyway.

The Pat Mills interview was good, just as Mills is a good writer. I have never really freaked out over his stuff, but then I've never really freaked out over 2000AD. I actually preferred Margaret O'Connell's column to Kath Glancy's, even though Margaret's may be described as a bit cynical a lot of it was all too true. The only Bizarro character I really fell for was Bizarro-Green Lantern--excellent stuff.

The other articles were all quite good and I cannot agree more about K. Williams' comments about John Byrne's weak stories. Thundermole is an essentiality (interesting word, that), as ever. Top of the list, though, as one might expect, was Reaction, and a very well put together Reaction it was, if I may say so.

Paul Gravett points out the excellence of French comics, and with my limited exposure to them I can only agree. I haven't bought many issues of HEAVY METAL (four, to be exact!), but the glimpse of the French reprints in them have made me wish I could get some of this material. Stories like "What is Reality, Papa?" by Ribera and Godard, "Ambassador of the Shadows" by Christin and Mezières (from the Valerian: Time-Space Agent series), strips by Caza, "The Immortals' Fête" by Enki Bilal...most of these are from Pilote but there's bound to be lots of other stuff I'm missing out on. As for those I mentioned, the only thing I can think of doing is buying up lots of back issues of HEAVY METAL. Anybody got some going cheap? (Fat chance!)

The emotions that washed over me when I read the letter of mine you printed were a mixture of surprise, embarrassment and general disbelief. Martin, that letter is from over a year ago, predating what I thought was my first letter printed (in F/A #71) by almost half a year! Let's see though, I was incredibly clairvoyant about Bem taking an American slant. OGRE and MASTERS OF INFINITY are both now deceased (R.I.P.). I cringed most at my attempted description of The Residents (I hope they didn't get hold of the issue somehow); I was obviously on one of my categorisation trips, now I just hold the view "music is music" and it doesn't matter what style it is or who plays it as long as it's good.

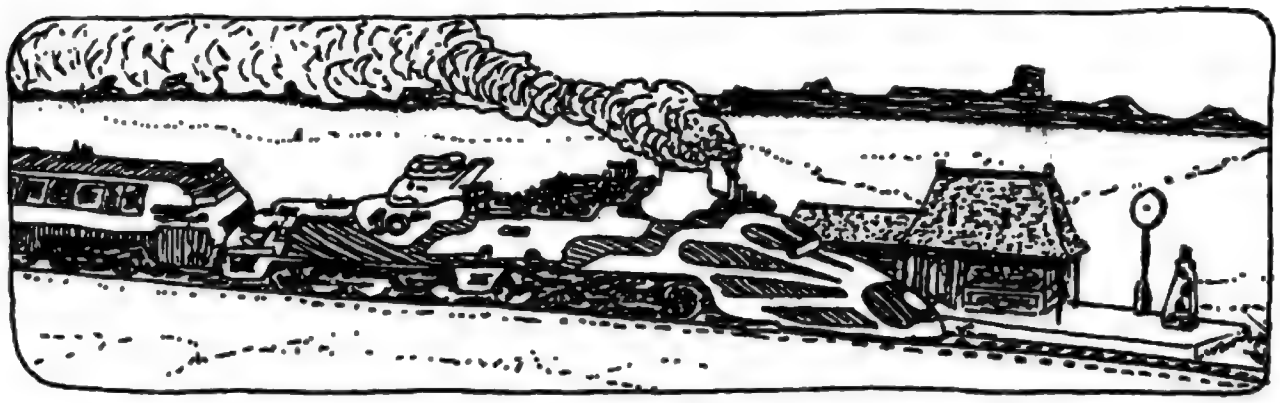
As far as the direct sales comics are concerned, I still think it would be a good idea to make DOCTOR STRANGE direct sales only, but the other two (DAREDEVIL and MASTER OF KUNG FU) I'm not so sure about.

Regardless of what I said at the start, I will still subscribe to Bem.

David Hunter

I'm glad to see that Bem 35 actually made it --it was well worth the wait. The Nemesis interview and feature were excellent. I could sit and drool over Nemesis all day--which probably explains why all of my 2000ADs are covered in fungus. My only criticism of the interview was that Adam kept changing the subject whenever the talk got really interesting. Bloody infuriating after a while. (Pardon my French.)

Why is there so little talk about 2000AD in Reaction? It only ever seems to get mentioned in passing. If someone would start the ball rolling by giving me something to reply to every issue. I might



never have to pay for another Bam in my life! (Only joking -- honestly!)

One of my pet hates is the poor quality of paper that 2000AD is printed on. Why, for God's sake? It makes the comic look so tatty and cheap. Surely it could use high-quality printing similar to that of STARLORD?

Over the last few months I haven't been enjoying Judge Dredd as much as I used to. (Cries of "Sacrilege!" "Blasphemy!") The "Apocalypse War" epic was a good adventure, but it seems a bit weak when compared with "The Cursed Earth". The script doesn't seem to be as off-the-wall and fun to read any more--where are characters like General Blood 'n' Guts, and the Burger Kings? I thought that it was far too easy for Dredd to demolish East-Meg One, and after such a long build-up it was a cop-out in many ways. It looks as if John Wagner is losing his edge. If he is, it is a sad day for the Dredd strip. (For best effect, "The Last Post" should be played at this point...)

The strip has been further spoilt by Carlos Ezquerra being given all the artistic chores on it, and consequently putting out a lot of rushed, substandard work. A pity, when you remember his excellent work on Major Eazy (in BATTLE) and Strontium Dog (in STARLORD).

The high point of the comic at the moment, as far as I am concerned, is Ace Trucking Co. This is so funny, and so wildly original. The part in "The Kloistar Run" where that guy bursts into the room and announces the assassination attempt had me rolling around with laughter. Belardinelli's art is really excellent -- has anyone else noticed how he has given Garp's scarf a life of its own? Wagner and Grant have written what could turn out to be a masterpiece. I hope they continue for a very long time.

After all that gushing praise, it is time for another of my pet hates: this one is Tharg. Why does IPC have to be so damn patronising and childish? "Tharg" (bloody stupid name) is an insult to anyone's intelligence. It may be an accepted part of British comics, but how can you expect anyone to take comics seriously when they are filled with "Borag Thungs" and "Splundig vur Thrigg"?!? 2000AD seems to be moving towards an older audience, so couldn't Tharg be slowly pushed into the background? (Having said all this, I'm the one who wrote to 2000AD a few years back starting my letter with "Hail Tharg". And before you laugh, I got £10 for my trouble.)

It's nice to see so many 2000AD albums on the market, despite Simon Russell's assertions to the contrary.

To Dick Domar: As a result of your "Jonah Hex is kool" campaign I picked up a few copies (namely issues 58 to 61) to see if it really did compare with Judge Dredd. I found them to be highly boring, especially the one about the cretin and his supposedly lost dog. Perhaps the ones that I read weren't up to the usual standard. If not, God only knows how you can rave over that rubbish.

On the same note, could someone give me advice on which four-colour comics to read and/or collect? My interest has always been solely U.K. orientated, and I have only started seriously collecting in the past few years. Talk in Reaction has made me realise that I am perhaps missing out on some good stuff, so gimme the gen.

/(Hmm. It's difficult to know what would be most likely to appeal to you. CAMELOT 3000, NEW TEEN TITANS, DAREDEVIL, THE SPIRIT, THE BATMAN and DETECTIVE COMICS, CAPTAIN CARROT, THE X-MEN? Throw a little money around and see what appeals to you. -Martin)/

Geoff McLaurin

I finally tracked down issue 35, which I received on Friday 22nd October '82 along with a couple of EC reprints and issue six of WARRIOR. I finished the two ECs and WARRIOR yesterday, and I have reached page 44 of Bam. So far.

You may be wondering what's prompted me to write without finishing the issue. Well Dave Harwood's "Ghosts in the House" reminded me of a letter I'd received from a friend in the States earlier in the month. This concerns Neal Adams' latest efforts. Yes, the long-awaited MS MYSTIC saga. I'm told that most of the artwork in issue 1 was done by Mike Nasser augmented by Adams? All the credit that Nasser gets is for "assistance". I wonder if you are in a position to confirm, or check this out? I must admit I'm still awaiting this issue with interest, and as long as the art is reasonable I'm not really worried who drew it; I'm more interested in the story aspect. However, if the above is correct, then there is something ethically wrong. After all, the whole hype surrounding this comic is that it is a Neal Adams book.

/(The credit is "Created and written by Neal Adams, with the assistance of Mike Nasser"; curiously, although the letterer, colourist and zipatoner are credited, nothing is said about the art itself, though it certainly looks like Adams... not that that would rule out a hefty Nasser contribution. But quoting from the Neal Adams interview in THE COMICS JOURNAL #72, Adams says "I was originally going to do (it) with Michael Nasser. Mike thought it would be a good idea to do a female character, and I came up with all the concepts behind Ms Mystic. We decided to do it together, but Mike has since deserted various forms of civilisation in favour of living a very, very different life from what most of us live. So, until and unless he comes back and wants to join in, I'm doing Ms Mystic for Pacific Comics on my own... It's a good character, an interesting character. It's one of the five characters I created for a portfolio for Sal Quartuccio."

/(When pressed whether he had drawn a Ms Mystic strip prior to that, he denied it. "Mike and I had worked on a strip for awhile, but it was put aside in favour of going our separate ways and doing other stuff. I finished it, and it will be the first issue. Then I'll be continuing to do stories for future issues."

/(That's the situation. While it looks as if a full art credit might give Mike Nasser and Neal Adams fairly equal billing on the first issue only, at least for pencils, there is no art credit as such in the book, and the Ms Mystic character was created by Adams, so I don't see anything ethically wrong, especially if Nasser has abandoned the project leaving future issues to be done by Adams alone. -Martin)/

Anyway, getting back to the "Ghosts" article, it would seem that the old Batman, pre "New Look", which I always thought was by Bob Kane, is likely to have been by a number of other people. I can remember quite a few comics I used to have bearing that legend --and now you tell me he didn't draw them. Oh well, we live and learn. /(A strange situation -- a bit like Walt Disney's name on all the "Disney" duck books. But I feel that the Overstreet Price Guide is being a little cautious when, for BATMAN, it credits Bob Kane with interior art only on the first two issues, plus four more covers! -Martin)/

The article on the CPL Gang was also of great interest. I've been collecting quite a lot of Ditko Charlton comics, and especially the superhero titles, the Blue Beetle and Captain Atom, with quite a reasonable success. However, I've never yet come across the Charlton Bullseye series--so thanks for the information, I'm much obliged. /(You're welcome. While the Portfolio is rare, at least in Britain, the 5 magazine-size Bullseyes do turn up quite often at comic marts. -Martin)/

Richard Starkings

It's unfortunate that Mike Taylor's review of DR WHO MONTHLY concerned an issue (#56) in which Steve Parkhouse, as author of the lead comic strip in the magazine, had not yet settled very comfortably into his stride. Whilst I would agree with Mike that Mills and Wagner were better suited to translating the Tom Baker image of the Doctor (and by the word 'image' I mean not the way the Doctor looked, but the way that he thought and acted) into strip form than was Steve Parkhouse, I would suggest that this was simply because the sense of humour

continued on page 66...

SHANNA
OF THE JUNGLE

A HEROINE HISTORY
BY JAY LONGSTAFF

Shanna didn't just appear in the first issue of the current KA-ZAR series out of nowhere. Like many Marvel characters, she has drifted into sight and out again over the years--it's a complicated story, but it begins in a comic dated December 1972, so she is now able to celebrate a decade of comics activity.

SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL #1 appeared as one of a three-title "mini-trend" of Marvel comics, along with THE CAT and also NIGHT NURSE; Stan Lee and Roy Thomas had wanted to start a comic dealing with a female superdoer for some years, apparently, and when they sat down to discuss what kind of book to do, they came up with three vastly different concepts, all of which they liked enough to put them on the schedules right away. THE CAT was written by Linda Fite and drawn by Marie Severin; NIGHT NURSE was written by Jeanie Thomas and drawn by Win Mortimer; and SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL was to be scripted by Carole Seuling and drawn by George Tuska.

"Perhaps the most beauteous and offbeat jungle heroine in the history of the graphic arts" was how Marvel modestly described Shanna; unfortunately, her book wasn't really very good. It lasted five issues, one more than either of the other two titles; but that's when her story really starts to get interesting.

Shanna O'Hara was brought up in Africa by her parents. She had hated killing of any kind for as long as she could remember, particularly the senseless murdering of animals...or people. Shanna's mother had had a pet leopard; eventually, it began to kill the livestock and run amok, and her father, Gerald O'Hara, set out with his rifle to kill it. Shanna followed him, tried to dissuade him, and then:

"I saw it move! It's in there!" Gerald O'Hara pointed his rifle into the bushes, finger tight on the trigger. "Have to fire before it attacks!"

"No, Daddy", Shanna screamed, dashing forward. "It's not -- oh, nooooooo!!"

The gun fired, and a figure stumbled out of the foliage. Not a leopard, but Shanna's mother...dying.

Gerald O'Hara was almost destroyed by this, and took refuge in drink; Shanna was sent away, and completed her education in America. She became an Olympic-standard gymnast, and got a job as environmental specialist at New York's municipal zoo--not that she needed to work, as her father had become one of the wealthiest men in all Africa.

One rifle had killed her mother; now another one cast the shadow of the gun across her life. Woken before dawn, she rushed to the zoo, only to find a scene of carnage. Some madman had shot every lion, tiger, and leopard on display. Zoo employees looked down helplessly; Shanna leapt down into the exhibit-pit, hoping that somewhere, one still survived.

And one leopardess, Julani, heard her familiar voice, and limped painfully out of the shadows. Shanna bent to examine her wounds, and Julani licked her hand--and then an over-excited zoo employee, thinking Shanna was in danger, used his gun to kill Julani.

Sickened, Shanna decided to leave the zoo. Julani had had two cubs, which had been safe in the hospital that night; she was given permission to take them back to Africa in a project like the "Born Free" return of Elsa the lioness to the wild.

Biri was a black leopard, and Ina was a spotted one; they grew up with Shanna, who wore a costume made from poor Julani's pelt for sight/scent recognition. They all three became jungle creatures, two leopards and a leopard woman, swift and strong -- so much so that she was called Shanna the She-Devil!

Like many a comics jungle goddess before her, Shanna took the whole of the nature reserve under her care, and in the first issue of her comic she could be seen thwarting a stereotypical ivory poacher, who was not only pencilled by George Tuska and inked by Vince Colletta, but, finally, trampled to death by stampeding elephants. It wasn't a very complicated story, but then, with almost half the pages turned over to flash-backs, there wasn't room for complexity. It established Shanna as a competent, liberated woman; it also introduced the game preserve's warden, an expatriate Irishman called Patrick McShane with whom she had a "teen-age malt-shop relationship", as she (or Steve Gerber) later remarked.

When you've done the story about the wicked ivory poachers, it's only logical to move on to the wicked slavers, which were Shanna's target in issue two. Shanna and Patrick are spending a quiet afternoon relaxing, when a jeep approaches. Shanna, confident enough now of Ina and Biri's loyalty that she's diminished the amount of sight/scent recognition from a one-piece bathing suit to something more like a bikini (except for a few retaining straps), stands up to greet the turban-wearing SHIELD agent, Jakuna Singh, who tells her of El Montano, a master criminal who plans to steal a French moon shot, and keeps a palace well-stocked with slaves. Singh asks Shanna to infiltrate the fortress-palace; for the sake of the slaves, she agrees.

Unfortunately, an over-zealous sentry sees her as she tries to infiltrate the slavers' camp, and she, along with Biri and Ina is overpowered and chloroformed, to wake, securely tied, in El Montano's dungeon. Shanna managed to remove the nose-mask from Ina, and the leopard wakes up and bites through her bonds. When she and both big cats are free, they stage a fight, and the jailer, who'd been told to allow no harm to come to them, rushes in, only to be accused by Shanna of being a sadistic killer, and killed by her pets.

It doesn't take long for Shanna to find the palace's missile control centre, and El Montano, who's gloating that the pay-load in the rocket isn't the instruments that the French originally put in, but a billion dollars worth of heroin!

Let's ignore El Montano's little joke, as the rocket achieves lift-off, of, er, "rising profits", and let's not try to work out <u>why</u> smuggling the drug onto a space-rocket should be such a good way of moving heroin across Africa. Instead, see Shanna charge in, destroy the missile control console, and battle the bulky, Kingpin-size El Montano and his bullwhip. The leopards battle his minions, as Shanna grabs a machine-gun and destroys the rest of the electronic equipment.

El Montano runs for it, and releases his Siberian guard-wolves. Reluctantly, as they are members of an endangered species, Shanna kills one with a karate chop, and uses it like a flail to clear a path through the others. She's soon hot on Montano's heels again. Pulse racing, almost exhausted, he runs on, and takes a short cut over the main slave pen. But, unfortunately, the flimsy board structure collapses under his weight, and he falls among the slaves he'd ill-treated for so long. That's one villain we're not likely to see again...

Jakuna Singh and French soldiers arrive in time for mopping up, and the rocket heads on for the moon, though without its payload of instruments it's not going to be much good to anyone. As Shanna says in the final panel, "With 500 kilos of heroin aboard, I'd say that rocket is--

completely spaced!"

"The Moon of the Fear-Bulls" starts with a dynamic splash page featuring Shanna, knife, and a huge crocodile whose final mistake had been to make hungry advances to Patrick McShane. We've reached the one about the lost civilization, which in this case is a group of Minoans; their ancient practise of vaulting over large bulls has become more dangerous since a mysterious glowing cave gave them the ability to emit a fear-inducing ray when threatened. It's lucky that Shanna and the Minoans can all speak classical Greek, though how their high priest comes to be the recently-deposed dictator of a West African republic would be difficult to explain in any language. Shanna vaults her fear-bull, directs its ray at the dictator, and helps the resistance to win back their freedom, before hurrying home to her house in a banyan tree in time to supervise the building of a more modern home. Patrick reappears in time to offer to carry her over its threshhold when appropriate--but Shanna reminds him that Ina and Biri never leave her side.

Steve Gerber, who'd assisted with the first issue by doing a bit of additional dialogue, scripted the next issue, from a plot by the departing Carole Seuling. It begins, after some acrobatics with a rhino, in a more civilized part of the Dark Continent; Shanna, wearing an evening dress, her cats on leashes, and escorted by Patrick, goes to a dinner party given by someone unknown at a luxurious mansion outside town.

Their host, hooded, appears, and tells his guests that he plans to overthrow the governments of three African states and consolidate them under one ruler, himself. For this, his guests will be useful. Lem Stover, diamond merchant, as financier; Lord Dunbar Ainsley of Britain for his diplomatic connections; General Mojo to lead the army; Patrick McShane to design and head the civil service (and we thought he was just a game warden...); and Shanna O'Hara to act as a charismatic figure to bring people flocking to the cause.

All five refuse; the villain removes his hood, to reveal a completely inhuman head, the head of the Mandrill. He already has a small army of followers--

"--My converts to a religion of hate! Like these finely-muscled females -- they worship me -- have allowed themselves to be tattooed in my image!"

Since these bizarre-looking women have guns, refusal is not going to be easy... but Shanna runs for it, gets to the Land Rover that she and Patrick arrived in, and, after a cross-country chase, gets back to the hotel.

Jakuna Singh is waiting for her, and asks her to go back, this time wearing a homing device in a bracelet. It seems that the Mandrill has other prisoners at his mansion as well as the dinner party guests... including Gerald O'Hara, her father.

The idea is that she allows herself to be captured, and she succeeds, waking up from the tranquilizer to find a smiling fellow about to tattoo her face with his Mandrill design. She's strapped down, but breaks the straps, knocks out both the tattooist and the Mandrill, and frees Ina and Biri. The Mandrill recovers, and drives off with his five captives, but Shanna rams his truck, and he runs off towards the jungle. He might have escaped --but he jumps into the enclosure that he had stocked with wild mandrills, in his vanity. Shanna manages to save him, but when she gets back she finds that, while the dinner guests are safe, her father has been spirited away by Mandrill's armed women.

Steve Gerber was in full control of the scripting with the fifth issue, which, after crocodiles and rhinoceroses, has as its all-action splash page... Shanna and Patrick arm-wrestling? Shanna wins, which doesn't do Patrick's masculine ego much good.

This time, Jakuna Singh arrives in a jet-fighter, and carries Shanna, Patrick, Ina, and Biri to a SHIELD aircraft carrier just off the coast. After a little bit of trouble with the leopards, who aren't too happy in the crowded cockpit, they land safely, and are briefed, via a television link to America, by Professor Xavier, no less. Two powerful mutants have been located in their part of Africa, presumably by Cerebro; one is the Mandrill, the other is as yet unknown. "On the other one -- all we've got is a 'power rating'. And it's big."

Xavier's transmission ends with a thinly disguised offer of help from the X-Men if required. Is the second mutant in league with the Mandrill? It seems possible.

As Shanna, McShane, and Singh sit down to dinner, the scene shifts to a jungle clearing, illuminated by a full moon and dominated by a forty-foot idol in the shape of a mandrill. A pale yellow-skinned woman in a skimpy black costume and cape is leading Mandrill's female followers in a bizarre ceremony of hate. She is Nekra --Priestess of Darkness. She is working up the others to fever pitch:

"In the name of the Mandrill, cry--HATE! Our leader is imprisoned! He must be freed! And free him we shall! So are we sworn! But first--death must come to the woman who captured him! Death most brutal! Death most foul! Death -- at the hands of Nekra! Shanna O'Hara must perish by the power of hate!"

Later that night, Shanna is jolted out of some self-centred brooding by a loud explosion from the direction of Patrick's house, and, Tarzan-style, swings through the vines at top speed, to find the place on fire and Nekra blocking her way. To get to Patrick, she must defeat Nekra, but, fueled by her hate, she's "a cross between Bela Lugosi and a Sherman tank", as Shanna tells herself after hitting the ground rather hard. Biri and Ina divert Nekra's attention, and Shanna is able to dash into the blazing house and rescue Patrick.

The leopards didn't stand a chance, against Nekra's almost invulnerable skin -- and she's about to use her claws on their stunned bodies! Desperately, Shanna leaps back into the fray. She even draws her knife, but it shatters on Nekra's sallow skin. Nekra moves in for the kill, but Shanna remembers her training, gets an arm round her throat, and is able to apply enough pressure to make Nekra black out. Ina, Biri, and Patrick recover, and Nekra lies unconscious as the issue, and Shanna's run in her own title, ends.

But, to quote the "Shanna's She-Mail" closing words, "Shanna's saga has only begun". Prophetic words!

All five issues were inked by Vince Colletta, with George Tuska as penciller on the first issue and Ross Andru on the next four. The only thing on the "plus" side for the art is that the first two issues both had Steranko covers.

Patrick and Shanna tied Nekra to a tree, but she refused, even at gunpoint, to tell Shanna where Mandrill's female army was holding Gerald O'Hara prisoner. Shanna hurried off to the city to radio her friend Jakuna Singh for help, leaving Patrick guarding Nekra -- but by the time they returned, Nekra had escaped -- and Patrick lay dead, killed by Nekra's bare hands. Shanna was too angry even to cry.

Instead, she swore vengeance...and set about following every lead, contacting anyone she'd ever met who might know anything about Mandrill...and therefore about Nekra. She went to Japan, England, and various parts of Africa, without any luck, before returning to the preserve-- only to be abducted by pterodactyls.

And that takes us to KA-ZAR number one. Not the April 1981 version, but instead the January 1974 issue, which continued Ka-Zar's adventures from his series in ASTONISHING TALES. The writer was Mike Friedrich, and, since the art was by Paul Reinman and Mike Royer, perhaps it is just as well she only appears in the last panel.

A gentleman calling himself Malgato the Red Wizard invokes a legend of the Savage Land that, once every thousand years, a man and woman of heroic stature must sacrifice themselves to appease the sun-god, or else the fires that allow the place to remain warm and fertile will grow cold, and the Savage Land will die. Aided by Mua-Gor the Man-Ape, he captures the Lord of the Hidden Jungle, who ends up tied to a stake, and at the next stake:

"A girl!"

"The name's Shanna, blue-eyes. Shanna the She-Devil, as they call me back home in Africa! It seems I'm the lady that's supposed to fulfil this nut's ritual requirements.

"Looks like he's got us dead to rights --and pretty soon", she continued, "we'll be just plain dead."

Shanna was a full co-star for the next issue, illustrated by the best art team she'd had yet: Don Heck, whose beautiful girls have often been copied by other artists, and Jack Abel. The scripter was still Mike Friedrich, who did the best he could with what was more a problem in ethics than a conflict.

As ever, Zabu comes to the rescue, and with one swipe of his paw Ka-Zar is free to lunge away from the sacrificial flames and towards Malgato.

"Ka-Zar--free me first," Shanna shouts. "You just may need the help of Shanna the She-Devil! This wizard's deadly, Ka-Zar-- deadlier than you think!"

"No!" Ka-Zar bellows back. "You are but a frail woman -- while Ka-Zar is mighty!"

Not the most auspicious start to one of the best-handled relationships in comics, was it? But this was years before Ka-Zar got his new elocution coach, Bruce Jones.

The two do eventually escape, and head for Tongah's village. A triceratops comes thundering in, chewing up a pet horse and destroying everything in its way. Ka-Zar saves the traditional child-in-its-path,

and along with Zabu leaps onto its scaly head -- in the end, it blunders off into the jungle.

Tongah's people take this as the wrath of the sun-god, and call Ka-Zar a blasphemer for resisting the sacrifice; a new rumble ensues, which only ends when Shanna knocks Ka-Zar out, hoists him over her shoulder, and, accompanied by Zabu, who has a spear in his side, walks off with him.

When Ka-Zar comes round, he finds that Shanna has used her veterinary skills to patch up our favourite sabre-tooth, and has a plan; they're going to give themselves up to Malgato!

However, instead of leaping into the flames, for some reason they leap down into the pit around the flame bowl, and tip it over, setting the room on fire and breaking the bowl, which, Malgato yells in despair, cannot be replaced.

Shanna has a moment of doubt; if she has guessed wrong, she may have doomed the Savage Land. A pterodactyl swoops in, only to smash into the wall, and fall to the ground, broken, revealing robotic insides.

The wizard was a fake, who'd exploited the old legend to get the people behind him; Shanna had guessed it when that old triceratops had eaten the pet horse, as she knew that a genuine triceratops would only have eaten plants.

Darn clever, yes? It makes you wonder why Mike Friedrich doesn't write comics any more (but not a lot).

"We really don't know very much about him, do we?" comments Shanna after Malgato vanishes in a cloud of smoke. "If not magic -- then what <u>was</u> the source of his power?"

"And who <u>is</u> he really?" Ka-Zar mutters gravely, gazing out to sea. "Perhaps we may never know!"

The story ends with Ka-Zar asking Shanna if she'd like to stay, as he feels that they have much in common.

"We do -- but I've also got a missing father, and I've sworn to find him!

"Your offer's tempting, though..." she muses. "...you're my type, Ka-Zar -- free and wild!

"Be seeing you, blondie! I've got a long journey home," she finishes, grabbing a handy vine...

It was only later that it was revealed that Patrick McShane was dead at that time -- perhaps a few months had passed, and the memory was no longer painful.

Anyway, when Shanna got back to her banyan tree home, the new game preserve warden handed her a telegram with the news that her father had been found dead in Capetown. Along with Jakuna Singh, she went there, and was told that her father had been murdered, by a paid, professional assassin -- and Singh also told her that the Mandrill had escaped from the SHIELD prison he'd been kept in, the wall of his cell sliced open as if it had been butter.

Since he had been Shanna's scripter at the time her own title finished, Steve Gerber was responsible for her, and he decided to resolve the dangling plot-threads in another title he was writing: DAREDEVIL. And he did this in a multi-issue story that lasted longer than the She-Devil's own book, the story of Black Spectre.

The story begins in Daredevil #108, out the same month as Ka-Zar #2, with the Man Without Fear dashing back from San Francisco to New York, leaving the Black Widow behind, because Foggy Nelson has been shot. He tells Matt Murdock that he had been investigating a plot, that government printing plates were going to be stolen. "Black Spectre...stop them...Matt--"

It is of course Matt's red-clad alter ego who swings off to the midtown museum where the printing plates are on show; he finds his old foe the Beetle there, and, while he manages to knock the Beetle out, he's overcome by a tear-gas attack by the bulkily-clad warriors of Black Spectre.

"The world's most invincible warriors--wielding the mightiest weapon of all--the power of hate", they boast as they take the plates. "Our cause is sacred--and by defeating the Beetle, you have aided that cause. Thus, as a token of our gratitude, we're instructed to let you live, and to warn you, masked man: any attempt to interfere with us again will be fatal to you and all whom you love!"

Issue 109 starts with suspicious cops accusing DD of being a fake, which gives the Beetle a chance to escape. Later, Matt visits Foggy, and learns more of the Black Spectre movement. They've claimed responsibility for a race riot at the base of the Statue of Liberty, for adding a swastika to the top of the Washington Monument, for draping the Independence Hall in Philadelphia in black to indicate mourning, and adding Hitler's face to the Mount Rushmore memorial. And in each case, a strange blimp has been sighted overhead!

Back in San Francisco, the Black Widow is ambushed by Nekra, defeated, and then carried off to that self-same blimp.

And then, in New York, Wall Street is being deluged with dollar bills, printed on those stolen plates. The Black Spectre troops are throwing the money down, and filming the chaos. Daredevil tries to stop them, and is joined by the Beetle, who has a score to settle with them for stealing "his" plates. So surprised is DD by having the Beetle as a (momentary) ally that he lets his guard down, and is knocked out by the Beetle, who gathers up some of the cash and flies off...when he wakes up, it's to see the familiar face of his ally from San Francisco, Police Commissioner O'Hara, looking down on him.

O'Hara? Now, where have we heard that name before?

Later, O'Hara, Matt Murdock, and the recovering Foggy Nelson are discussing what they know of Black Spectre. Why are they using a blimp? For what? And whose is it, who is behind Black Spectre?

Enter a striking redhead with a pair of leopards, black and spotted, on a leash.

"Perhaps I can answer that, Mr Nelson. He's the same man who killed my father--who was also your brother, Uncle Robert "Ironguts" O'Hara!

"Or don't you recognize your niece: Dr Shanna O'Hara -- Shanna the She-Devil!"

The story continues in MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #3, also scripted by Gerber, in which DD is told more about Gerald O'Hara's death by Shanna, and how his will stipulated that every penny from his diamond business be handed over to someone named Hensley Fargus -- whom she suspects is really the Mandrill. What this has to do with Black Spectre Shanna isn't sure -- "But I'm convinced that Dad's money is funding their insane scheme."

DD witnesses another of Black Spectre's strange, vicious stunts, a play which has hypnotised actors dressed as Captain America and Hitler killed on stage; and then Daredevil and Ben Grimm, using the Fantasticar, attack the blimp.

They find that it's armoured, but they manage to break in. The Thing battles Nekra and a brainwashed Black Widow, and gets through into an inner chamber, which is decorated as a jungle and contains the big mandrill idol last seen in Shanna #5. But one look into the eyes of the black-robed leader of the cult paralyzes him, while Daredevil is knocked out by Nekra and the Widow; the two heroes are dumped back into the Fantasticar, and only just revive in time to stop it from making a rather large crater in the countryside.

After two issues of DD pencilled by Bob Brown and inked by Paul Gulacy and Don Heck respectively, and the Two-In-One by Sal Buscema and Joe Sinnott, DAREDEVIL #110 moves on to Gene Colan and Frank Chiaramonte. At last Daredevil has a small victory, overpowering two of the Black Spectre fighters; when they're unmasked, we find that they're the Mandrill's woman warriors, complete with the face-tattoo. He takes them to the 17th Precinct police station, and is joined there by Shanna, Ina and Biri. No sooner has she arrived than the two prisoners -- blow up.

The next phase of Black Spectre's plan begins with the leader boarding a shuttle-jet and leaving the blimp. When Daredevil

gets home, he finds the hooded leader waiting for him--he knows that Daredevil is Matt Murdock, because the Black Widow has told him.

"Natasha did that--?"

"She -- loves me," the leader says, and removes his hood, to reveal the inhuman visage Shanna knows so well from her dreams of vengeance. "All women love me. I am their master. I am -- Mandrill!"

Mandrill proceeds to tell Murdock his origin. In 1944, an atomic accident in a research laboratory effected two people, a white scientist and a black cleaning lady. A year later, the white man's wife bore a son, with brown skin and tufts of hair over his body -- and the black woman had a daughter, with sallow yellow-white skin and vampire-like fangs.

The boy's mutation grew worse, and he became more animal-like, until when he was ten his father drove him out into the desert, and left him to die. But he lived, due to his mutant strength, and he met the girl, Nekra, who was running away from the prejudice her "white" skin had brought her in a black community. She had never trusted anyone before, but like all women she fell under the Mandrill's spell. And they soon learnt of Nekra's special ability, how by the power of hate she could become strong and invulnerable. And so their alliance was sealed, an alliance that led to their attempt to take over several African countries and create "a near utopia" -- but Shanna had thwarted them. Shanna, the only woman who had ever resisted the Mandrill's power.

And now the Mandrill's plan, the Black Spectre plan, was to overthrow the U.S. government. Would Daredevil care to join his cause, perhaps?

Unfortunately, Daredevil isn't tempted by this generous offer, and a short fight ensues. Mandrill escapes.

DAREDEVIL #111 doesn't have the usual picture of the Black Widow to the right of the title; instead, for one issue only, she is replaced by Shanna in her costume. The art inside is by Bob Brown and Jim Mooney. The splash page takes us to the hotel room occupied by Shanna, where "Ironguts" O'Hara says mildly, "I hope you've got a good reason for coming to my niece's room at three a.m., horn-head!"

The reason, of course, is DD's discovery that the leader of Black Spectre is the Mandrill, and that he plans to overthrow the United States government. He tells Shanna and the Commissioner of Mandrill's hellish childhood, too.

"And he figures that hatred of anyone who's different is part of the way of life in America... and that the only way to change that is by seizing control--running things his way."

Swinging off towards his long-neglected bed, DD is attacked by the Silver Samurai, whose sword can slice through solid stone. Daredevil is so tired he's losing, until the arrival of Biri, followed by Shanna and Ina--together, they managed to drive off the eight-foot tall, 400-pound giant sword-wielder.

Much later that morning, DD, Shanna, & "Ironguts" O'Hara hold a council of war with Foggy Nelson at the hospital; and, at last, Shanna is back in her costume. She tells the others all she knows about Mandrill, and how Patrick McShane and her father were killed (and this is, in fact, the first time we learn all this, and how her team-up with Ka-Zar fits into the continuity). It must have been the Silver Samurai's sword that sliced its way into the Mandrill's prison and freed him, they decide, so he too is definitely part of Black Spectre.

Just in time to save DD from explaining howcum Matt Murdock isn't with them, all hell breaks loose, and the Samurai and Mandrill's women warriors burst in through the window. Shanna is grabbed, and DD, when he attempts to follow, is quickly downed by Nekra.

Shanna still resists the Mandrill's "animal magnetism", and so he orders her taken to the blimp's science deck, so that she can be experimented upon. The Mandrill thanks the Silver Samurai for his work, and tells him that after the mission that night, "We'll consider your father's debt to me repaid," a remark which appears to puzzle Steve Gerber as much as it does us.

That night's mission is a raid on the Empire State Building, to cut down its television broadcasting antenna. DD spots the blimp, and gets there in time to battle the Samurai and the Black Spectre warriors, but not in time to stop them. He leaps for the rope ladder hanging down from the blimp, and begins to climb.

DAREDEVIL #112 concludes the story, with art by Gene Colan and Frank Giacoia. The first problem for the Man Without Fear is that Nekra was guarding the top of the ladder, and descends to deal with him. It's quite a battle, but DD's acrobatic skill finally gets him above Nekra, and he enters the blimp, only to be greeted by the Mandrill himself. He manages to hold his own... until Nekra climbs back in, and knocks him out.

Mandrill's plan is reaching its climax. Radio communications are jammed, long-distance phone cables have been slashed, and the blimp is heading for Washington. The Mandrill claims to have planted an atomic bomb beneath Manhattan, and says he'll use it if the Avengers, Fantastic Four, or marines intervene.

Daredevil wakes strapped helplessly to a table on the science deck of Mandrill's blimp; on the next table is Shanna, and guarding them is the Black Widow.

While the gigantic mandrill idol is being lowered onto the White House lawn, Daredevil tries to persuade Natasha, the Black Widow, to release him.

"Pleading is useless, DD," Shanna says. "Only a strong shock might break the trance."

Daredevil tries to remind Natasha of a violent incident from a few days before, when they had caught some muggers and she had almost killed one, only stopped by DD actually hitting her -- a tender point, which rekindles her rage, which breaks through Mandrill's hold on her. She releases Matt and Shanna, and the three of them leave the blimp without problems, and burst into the oval office, where Mandrill, Nekra, and one of the woman warriors are hard at work. As you might expect, there is a fight. Mandrill and DD head for the roof, and Mandrill grabs Daredevil and holds him out above his head, ready to fling him down to the ground. But just then the blimp explodes, thanks to a few minor adjustments that the Black Widow had made before they left it, and the Mandrill is so shocked that DD regains the advantage, so that it is the Mandrill who takes the long fall.

Daredevil rejoins Shanna and Natasha, to find that they have managed to defeat Nekra -- but when they go outside to look for Mandrill's body, it's not there.

And so it ends; Shanna and her uncle head back to San Francisco, as does the Black Widow, and Matt Murdock promises them he'll follow soon.

Shanna makes a brief re-appearance in issue 117. Daredevil's arch-foe the Owl captures DD, and threatens to kill him unless the Black Widow captures someone for him. Only when her "victim" has dumped her on the carpet and turned on the light does she find that the person she was sent to abduct is Shanna.

The Black Widow carries the limp form of Shanna, now wearing her costume instead of her nightie, into the Owl's hideout, but before the villain can either attach Shanna to his mind-tap machine, to gain her veterinary knowledge, or wonder about her unusual sleeping attire, Shanna comes to life and begins to fight, freeing DD. Imagine the Owl's surprise! He'd been in prison, and didn't know that Dr Shanna O'Hara was more than an ordinary animal doctor. It's not long before Daredevil lands a knockout punch, and it's all over. That was the final Steve Gerber issue of Daredevil, plotted by him and scripted by Chris Claremont, with art by Bob Brown & Vince Colletta. It ended one chapter in Daredevil's life -- and it was Shanna's final four-colour appearance for 6 years.

However, Shanna merely moved over to Marvel's black & white magazine line. The same month as that final Daredevil appearance, she could be found in SAVAGE TALES #8, guest-starring in a 30-page Ka-Zar adventure, "The Billion Year War", by Gerry Conway, John Buscema, and Tony DeZuniga.

This tale doesn't advance the story of Shanna's career much; she is recruited once again by SHIELD, this time not by Jakuna Singh but by Barbara "Bobbi" Morse, later known as the (Marvel) Huntress. In a small merchant ship that's actually an Independent Remote Operations Vessel run by SHIELD, they navigate a subterranean river from Terra del Fuego, and steam into the Savage Land's Lost Lake.

As he's touchy about visitors from the outside world, it isn't long before Ka-Zar comes on board; since he knows both Bobbi (they had a good thing going at one time) and Shanna, he agrees to listen to what they have to say.

It leads to a trek through the jungle to a strange metal capsule worshipped by a local tribe. The SHIELD sailors with them don't last long, but Ka-Zar, Zabu, Shanna and Bobbi get to the capsule, and Ka-Zar battles a strange monster that emerges from it after sleeping since the time of Gondwanaland, millions of years ago before the fall of fabled Atlantis.

Ka-Zar wins, and the Earth is saved from imminent volcanic eruptions; Shanna and Bobbi Morse head back to civilization.

Shanna, however, doesn't stay there; she returns to the Dahomey reserve in Africa, along with the leopards Ina and Biri, and has her own 15-page strip in SAVAGE TALES #9, written by Carla Conway (assisted by her husband Gerry), with art supplied by The Tribe, which is Tony

DeZuniga and his studio.

It's not a happy return for Shanna, though; the Indian minions of Raga-Shah have attacked a safari party, and when Shanna arrives, only one member of the safari is still alive. It is SHIELD man Jakuna Singh, and he is wounded. He tells her to leave before it's too late--there is no hope for him. Suddenly, a giant Brahman bull charges into the clearing, shining golden in the sun, death glinting in its sapphire eyes. Shanna leaps on it, but her knife can't penetrate its hide, and she's thrown...

Jakuna Singh is trampled to death, and the blood-beast vanishes. Shanna tries to question the one surviving Indian thug, but once he knows Singh is dead, he allows himself to die.

The scene moves to Calcutta, as Shanna visits Singh's sister, Saropha. The girl who answers the door, however, isn't who she says she is, but rather another of Raga-Shah's people...and she's not alone. Shanna wins the fight, however, and the girl, rather than being captured, commits suicide. A nasty pattern is forming.

The only route to Raga-Shah's temple is the River Ganges, so Shanna travels up it by boat. The sailors, however, are not the sort of people that Shanna should have turned her back on -- when she wakes up, she is in the ancient temple, along with Singh's sister Saropha.

Saropha tells Shanna of Raga-Shah, the man who was to be her husband. She also tells of his plan to cause "the death of the world--the ultimate sacrifice to Kali! Raga-Shah and his followers believe it will bring them back in the next life!"

Raga-Shah appears, but Shanna avoids his thugs, and frees Ina and Biri from their crates. Together they run outside, only to face another of Kali's golden beasts, a giant elephant, Ghamolo, which Raga-Shah mystically activates with the life-force of her two leopards. She blinds the great beast, and heads it straight for Raga-Shah's temple, bringing it crashing down.

"Ruined--it's all ruined! You've destroyed my shrine and set fire to my temple! But, by these holy ashes of Daka-Jur I swear -- Raga-Shah will have his revenge!

"She-Devil -- your life will become a legacy of death... all you love will be destroyed...none shall survive my wrath, until you beg me for your own destruction!"

And the curse, which seems to cast its shadow back over her whole life, takes two noble spirits; the motionless bodies of Ina and Biri will never move again, their life-force destroyed...

No wonder Ka-Zar is having problems in his own book these days; nobody close to Shanna has an easy life. There's another 10-page story in SAVAGE TALES #10 by Carla Conway, that well-known typographical error Ross Andry, and Vinnie Colletta, in which Shanna tracks Raga-Shah to the Himalayas, only to be involved in a local kingdom's Hamlet-style problems. Shanna aids the old king's son, but in the end molten lava swallows half the valley, killing many people, and she walks off to continue her search for vengeance.

Three years pass, bringing us to THE RAMPAGING HULK #9, June 1978, which has an 18-page Shanna story, "The Wrath of Raga-Shah", by Steve Gerber and Tony DeZuniga.

This is late-period Gerber; Omega The Unknown's comic has ended, and we are within months of his last issue of Howard the Duck. The approach to Shanna is very different from before...in some ways, it is one of his best stories.

Shanna O'Hara is at home, washing the dishes in her suburban house in San Pedro, California, south of Los Angeles. Her great quest for Raga-Shah had petered out high in the frozen wastes of Tibet; now she was taking a refresher course in veterinary medicine at UCLA, and she was undergoing psychoanalysis.

Frankly, she needs it. She takes off her transparent nightgown, and puts on her She-Devil costume--the bikini bottom has lost its sides now, replaced on each side by a couple of thongs. There's no man in her life now -- instead, she works off her frustrations with a giant, half-tame python she calls Ananta.

"Yes--Yes! -gasp- Make me struggle--to be -gasp- free--!"

It wraps around her, pulling tight, and she wrestles with it, until:

"Ananta--hold! That's enough, my darling --we're playing with fire, true -- but we are still playing! We need one another, Ananta -- alive! Otherwise...who'd play with either of us, hmm?"

Hmm. Later, respectably dressed once more, Shanna drives to the home of a divorcee friend of hers, whose chatter is all about her ex-husband and other less than shattering news. They drive to a new shopping mall, "Taj Mahal Mall", complete with a vast, vulgar replica of the famous monument at the far end.

And who should they bump into but the owner of the mall, Raga-Shah no less! Shanna leaps for his throat, but his turbaned mall guards restrain her, and, in this "civilised" setting, she is helpless.

She spends the night at her friend's house, alternating coffee with valium, and goes for her regular session with her psychiatrist, Dr Betz, the next day. But Betz calls what she reports "delusions", and she storms out 15 minutes before her time is over, which rather catches the thuggees sent to capture her off-balance--they arrive in the elevator she's waiting for! She dashes down the fire-escape, shedding the constricting dress she'd been wearing, and puts up a good fight, until one finally sneaks up behind her and stabs her in the shoulder with a drug-coated dagger.

She awakes tied to Raga-Shah's altar, about to be sacrificed to Kali. Slowly, Raga-Shah's blade draws a line of blood along her thigh, and another, until she manages to pull free, to pull the chains from their moorings. Propelled by sheer ferocity, she ploughs into the cultists, until those left unharmed flee -- all but Raga-Shah.

"It--it's down--to you--and me, priest!"

"Y-you would slay me, then, She-Devil? You who avow the sanctity of life--?"

"No, Raga-Shah -- I shall leave that to another. I deplore needless slaughter, you see -- but I respect the law of the jungle!"

Almost contemptuously, she grasps the blade of his sword and flings it away bloody-handed... and with a mighty kick, knocks him unconscious.

No, she didn't kill him. A python like Ananta will only eat prey it kills itself --and, judging from the large bulge in its middle in the final panel, the world has seen the last of Raga-Shah.

But not of Shanna, of course, who came back triumphantly last year in KA-ZAR THE SAVAGE #1. The account of her past life given in that issue moves her straight from the New York municipal zoo to the Savage Land, by a plane journey and a parachute drop, which is so very great a simplification that it's just not true; she becomes a zoo veterinary who notices how neurotic even the sanest of animals became when caged, and realizes that, for her, civilization was a cage. "I knew that if I'd hung around and become any more 'civilized', I'd have gone nuts."

It wipes out all Shanna's life on the Dahomey game preserve, her triumphs and her tragedies -- it changes Shanna O'Hara just as much as Ka-Zar was changed for the new run, in fact. Let's be charitable and assume that, for her own reasons, she just didn't want to confide in Ka-Zar at that time, and he, although from her previous visits he must have known that she wasn't being entirely frank, didn't want to pry.

It would be a shame if Shanna's past was forgotten; it was pleasant to track down its twists and turns for this piece, and now at least we know better than to believe the revised version. Obviously; Shanna O'Hara was close to some sort of nervous breakdown when she encountered Raga-Shah at the shopping mall in Anaheim, and, after giving Ananta its last bumper breakfast in such an unconstitutional way, leaving America must have seemed like a good idea.

Back to Dahomey? No, too many memories there, the shades of Patrick McShane and Jakuna Singh, and her beloved leopards, Ina and Biri. Besides, civilization was only a jeep-ride away. Instead, why not a new life in the hidden world of the Savage Land? There had been a sort of chemistry between her and Ka-Zar, and on her previous visits she hadn't been able to take the leopards -- the shades of Ina and Biri wouldn't follow her there.

So, she hired a plane, and parachuted back into the prehistoric jungle, out of the twentieth century and away from such things as rifles, police, psychiatrists, and super-villains.

Undoubtedly she saved her sanity; she was now Shanna of the Jungle, and life was good. She is a true heroine, who has triumphed over some obstacles that would have destroyed a lesser person, always fighting, always strong--and in the end, it looks as if she has found herself.

She was lucky to be "adopted" as one of Steve Gerber's characters, and we were lucky that he was given the chance to do what he did, with the "Black Spectre" story and with that grand finale to the Raga-Shah plot -- would anyone else have had the nerve to set their confrontation in a shopping mall, and the talent to make it work? It made a strong finale to her solo adventures; showing her weaknesses only emphasized her basic strength of mind.

I don't know about you, but now that I've gone through all these stories, I'm very tempted to re-read the twenty-plus issues of KA-ZAR THE SAVAGE from Shanna's point of view. -JAY'LONGSTAFF

DON'T BE LEFT OUT IN THE COLD...

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AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR RANSON

conducted by
LUKE RAINFORD

Arthur Ranson's comic art is seen mostly in LOOK-IN, a weekly British comic that has presented work by many of the country's top artists over the years.

His style is hard-edged realism, and his renderings of famous personalities are particularly well-realized. The planning and execution that goes into Arthur's layouts is visually dynamic, easily on a par with Bellamy and Hampson for draughtsmanship.

His work has included humour strips such as comedian Les Dawson's "Super Flop" character, Michael Bentine's "Potties", "Just William", and "Doctor On The Go". His first adventure strip was "The Bionic Woman", previously drawn by John Bolton; he then went on to illustrate "Logan's Run", "The New Adventures of Oliver Twist", "Sapphire and Steel", "Buck Rogers", and others, all for Look-In; his other work has included "Target" for Polystyle Publications, and for LOOK AND LEARN he drew "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". He is now 43; he served as chairman of the Society of Strip Illustration for the 1980-1981 season.

Recently, Arthur was kind enough to answer various questions I put to him.

Look-in

WORZEL GUMMIDGE

ABBA

Look-in

FAR BELOW THE SURFACE OF THAT GRIM, GREY SEA...

MORE INTRUDERS, IT SEEMS.

THEY WILL END UP WITH THE OTHERS. GLORB WILL KNOW WHAT TO DO...

A MINING FREIGHTER ON ITS WAY BACK TO EARTH PASSES CLOSE TO A PLANET IN THE SYSTEM CLASSIFIED AS LYRON BETA...

PLANET CHARTED AS ANUBIS UNEXPLORED. BUT BELIEVED UNINHABITED, CAPTAIN...

LOG THE ENTRY. MAINTAIN COURSE.

Look-in

HOWARD THE ANTS

BUCK EXPECTS TO FIND THE DEAD CREW ON THE COMMAND DECK. BUT IT IS TOTALLY EMPTY!

THEY'VE GONE, WILMA. DO YOU READ ME? AND THE SURVIVAL-SUIT LOCKER'S EMPTY IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!

THE FANS LOVED HIS ROUGH, TOUGH WESTERN STYLE...

SPORTS ARENA LEAGUE CUP FINAL!

Look-in

MORK & MINDY ARE HERE!

APART THERE 'SPIN

...'KISSIN' COUSINS'...

...'FRANKIE AND JOHNNY'...

HE EVEN APPEARED IN SCUBA GEAR IN 'EASY COME, EASY GO'...

BUCK ROGERS CARRIES PASSENGERS. DOCTOR THEOPOLIS AND TWIKI...

HANG ONTO YOUR LID, PAL. WE'LL BE PASSING THROUGH THE STARGATE ANY MOMENT...

BI-DI-BI-DI! SINCE WHEN WAS I PROGRAMMED TO GET SPACE-SICK, SMARTY?

LATEST SQUAD-RAIDCARS NOW ARMED

MOCK

"'Ere, Charlie! Buy a bottle. This lot want us to go to a new kind of party!"

Some Recent Examples of Arthur Ranson's Work

THEN, SUDDENLY, DEAD AHEAD...

GOOD GRIEF!

Luke Rainford: Arthur, I wonder if you could tell me how you first became interested in comics?

Arthur Ranson: By reading those of my older brothers — we always had comics ever since I can remember.

LR: And which comics did you enjoy the most when you were younger?

AR: Radio Fun, Film Fun, Beano, and Knockout at first. And I started to read Wizard, Hotspur, and Champion, which were text comics mostly in those days. Then I discovered Superman and Captain Marvel, Captain Marvel Jr. When The Eagle appeared, I was 10 or 11; that took number one place.

LR: What made you decide to become a comic artist?

AR: Impulse.

LR: Did you have any art training?

AR: Yes, I was apprenticed to a firm of stamp and bank-note printers. At 21 I went to Walthamstow Art School, where I studied Painting and Print-making.

LR: Which artists influenced you as your style developed?

AR: For the funnies, Harry North (at present drawing the James Bond strip in the Star newspaper), then, for his "Just William", Thomas Henry, who was the original illustrator of the "William" stories. For adventure stuff, Frank Bellamy at first, then Al Williamson later for his Flash Gordon, Secret Agent Corrigan, and EC work. Williamson demonstrated that one didn't have to draw strips in a comic book style.

LR: And what was your first comic work?

AR: "Super Floo", if you don't count the ones I wrote and drew when I was 11.

LR: How did you come to work for LOOK-IN?

AR: I was a freelance illustrator, doing advertising work mostly, when I landed a job or two doing covers for Look-In. In the office one day I overheard that the artist on "Superflop", the late Brian Lewis, wanted to drop the strip. I did a specimen, and was taken on — bless you, Colin Sherbourn. Colin was Art Editor then, and is now "the" Editor.

LR: Apart from comics work, what other related art have you done? I noticed a cartoon in TV TIMES a few months back on Lorraine Chase's "Other 'Arf" TV series...was that a one-off, or have you done other work outside your Look-In stories?

AR: Yes, as an illustrator I've done advertising work, features for TV Times, book illustration, artwork for LOOK AND LEARN, illustrations for Men's magazines... I even appeared in The Sunday Times. But I do less now, as I prefer strip work.

LR: What generally is your approach to adapting a storyline?

AR: It really depends on the story. I'm interested in mood. "Sapphire and Steel" was moody and suited me. "Buck Rogers" I thought should be brighter, less mysterious, but I really wasn't working on it long enough to find my feet with it — a pity. For "Elvis", I aimed at a documentary approach. Likewise, with my new strip for Look-In I adapt the storyline, that is "use" particular subject matter, framing and drawing techniques to match the mood of the thing.

LR: What does a typical working day consist of?

AR: Well, I work from 9.30 to 5.30 and 8.00 to 10.30; I work at home alone, sometimes breaking for visitors if I'm lucky, although it depends on the visitors.

LR: I was really impressed with your work on "Sapphire and Steel" — you seemed to capture exactly the atmosphere of the show. Do you watch the shows that you've illustrated?

AR: Yes, as does the strips' writer, Angus Allen. Not all the time, perhaps, but enough to pick up atmosphere, and pick up any changes in hairstyle or costume.

LR: Do you have time for any hobbies or outside interests?

AR: Yes — my five-year-old daughter, Cassandra, reading, escapist stuff mostly, films sometimes, work...

LR: Are you interested in what's going on in the comic medium today?

AR: Yes, I like to know what's new, see what the other guys are doing.

LR: And which strip have you enjoyed working on the most?

AR: Whichever one I'm working on.

LR: I wonder if you could tell me which materials you use?

AR: Higgins waterproof black ink. Gilliot 1290 knibs. Ecoline watercolour inks for colour, on a cheaper version of CS10 board, and I'm in love with Conte's Criterium No.5 propelling pencil, with HB leads.

LR: What are your views on comic fandom?

AR: How can one have a view on such a diverse set of folk?

LR: Okay. Which artists do you admire inside and outside comics?

AR: I like lots of different people for lots of different reasons — to say who, I would have to say why, to say why would take a critique of the aesthetic that could run to ten volumes.

LR: Given a free hand, what kind of subject would you like to do?

AR: I keep changing my mind. Something with wide parameters, with a mythic quality. Intelligent and literate, that will also appeal to a mass public, and make me rich and famous.

LR: Would you consider doing a story for the American market, like some other British artists?

AR: If they do that stuff in the US, yes. If they asked me and paid me well, I'd have a go at something less significant too.

LR: Are there any changes you would like to see in the British scene?

AR: Too many to list here. To be stuffy about it, critical recognition and appreciation of the creative input of strip work, on the style of the Continentals, would bring them about.

LR: You became chairman of the S.S.I. by election of the committee; what did your post entail?

AR: The usual organisational stuff — meetings, letters, phone calls, reports, and all that kind of business.

LR: What are your own particular aims for the future of the Society?

AR: Well, I'm no longer chairman; the post is now held by Les Lilley, a writer. I shot my bolt with my own particular aims when I was chairman. Now I am just willing to support whatever the S.S.I. collectively decide. I found the chairmanship rewarding, but time-consuming, as I'm sure Les does now, but apart from that the S.S.I. doesn't belong to any one person or group of persons. It is a democratic organisation. Now, instead of being democratic from the chair, I'm being democratic from a back seat.

LR: And finally, Arthur, what direction would you like your own work to take in the next couple of years?

AR: Up!!

LR: Arthur Ranson, thank you.

Anyone interested in Arthur's work who would like to obtain back issues of the LOOK-INs containing his art can get them from Look-In Back Numbers Department, 66 Long Lane, Liverpool, L9 7BL, England, for 15p each plus postage, though not every issue may still be available.

Issues in which Arthur's work can be found are as follows:

"Sapphire and Steel": Look-In #33 to #52 1979, #1 to #19, #33 to #52 1980, #1 to #17 1981.

"Oliver Twist": #20 to #32 1980

"Elvis: The Story": #6 to #37 1981.

"Buck Rogers": #20 to #37 1981.

"The Story of the Beatles": #38 to #53 1981, #1 to #9 1982.

"CHiPS": commencing #23 1982

It should be noted that LOOK-IN's numbering starts from #1 again every January. "Sapphire & Steel", "Oliver Twist", and "Buck Rogers" were normally in full colour, two pages per week; "Elvis" was a single page per week in black & white, while "CHiPS" and "Beatles" ran to two black & white pages. "The Story of the Beatles" has been reprinted as a special magazine, costing 50 pence. —LUKE RAINFORD

made in Britain:

ROGUE TROOPER

The planet Nu Earth -- just another battleground in a galaxy-wide war...its atmosphere poisoned by chemical weapons, so that the soldiers fighting there had to wear air-tight suits, and any puncture meant sudden, choking death.

But the armoured suits, and their air supplies, were too bulky, too limiting, too easily detected, and so the blue-skinned Genetic Infantrymen were created, "Gene Troopers" who could breathe the poisons, and survive indefinitely on the war planet. But something went wrong, something referred to as "the Quartz Massacre", that destroyed them all...all, that is, except one. He never reported back to his superiors, he cut himself off from Milli-Com, and became a wanderer, a loner, fighting his own battles. There was something he had to find out, something that he needed to know -- and until he had the information, he was staying out, staying "rogue"...

Rogue Trooper's series began in 2000AD Prog 228, at the end of August last year, written by Gerry Finley-Day and drawn by Dave Gibbons, who had designed the series and was its first regular artist. Rogue has never had an official "origin"...he just appeared.

A small squad of Southern infantry, led by a captain, are advancing across a valley on Nu Earth, when a Hellstreak laser silo opens fire on them. They call up Milli-Com for assistance, but it is denied--however, other ears are listening!

Those ears belong to the last Genetic Infantryman. He runs towards the silo, and is soon fighting hand-to-hand with the Nort rearguard, with the advantage that all he needs to do to take one out of the fight is to rip off his air-hose. The two men outside the silo are quickly dealt with -- and the three inside do not last long, either...

The Captain thanks the Rogue Trooper for his aid. "But you know Milli-Com's looking for you -- I'll have to make a report!"

"Go ahead -- but I've got something to finish before I report back. I'm staying rogue till the job's done!"

He strides away, gun at the ready.

"But failure to report back is desertion, Captain," one of the soldiers says quietly. "And that means the firing squad! He must have a real good reason for going rogue...or perhaps he's just crazy!"

"Not crazy, son... but he's sure mad about something!"

And so the introductory episode ended. It was just one brief skirmish in a strange, futuristic war, but it served to introduce the lone Genetic Infantryman known as Rogue, and his three companions.

How can a lone soldier have companions? Well, each G.I. had had a micro-circuit chip implanted in his brain. If he were to take a fatal wound, his brain-patterns would be automatically recorded on this chip at the moment of death, even though his body had ceased to function.

Each G.I. had three main items of powered equipment: his helmet, his backpack, and his gun. And each of these items was provided with a special slot, which could keep a dead Genetic Infantryman's "dog-chip" energised until it could be returned to base, where medics could put it into a new clone body. In these slots, the chips were 'alive', and, as each slot had a micro-synthesiser and loud-speaker, they could talk, and even control certain functions of their particular item of equipment.

All three slots in Rogue's equipment were occupied -- and, since Rogue isn't reporting back to his officers, there's no chance of the three chip-carried personas getting put in clone bodies yet.

The rifle's bio-chip is Trooper Gunnar, a mildly insubordinate, extroverted humourist, who can link with the rifle's battle computer and activate its auto-fire programmes. Trooper Helm is in the helmet; he has a strong sense of location and direction, and is not given to impul-

sive actions. In the backpack's slot is Trooper Bagman, who has expert knowledge of weapons and applications, and often knows what item of equipment Rogue needs before Rogue himself does. With the three Troopers' names, it's easy to see why Rogue put them in each specific slot...

The idea for the bio-chips came from a Judge Dredd story in Progs 164 and 165, where Dredd and his companions visited a planet where rich people gained a kind of immortality by, after their bodies had died and their personalities had been encoded on bio-chips, hiring "host" bodies for so many hours per day -- but John Wagner's basic idea there was taken in a completely different direction for the new future war series.

The following Dave Gibbons-drawn episodes were also mainly self-contained, and as the weeks passed the readers learnt more about Rogue Trooper, and the battlefield he lived in. Prog 229 took Rogue to Nu Paree (similarities to Paris, France were enhanced by a reference made to its "mighty Mitterand tower"), reduced to rubble by a twenty-year struggle for its control between Nort and Souther forces. He allowed himself to be taken to the Southern headquarters, in the hope that Milli-Com could give him some leads on the Quartz Massacre -- but he was treated as a deserter, and was only saved the embarrassment of fighting his own side by the activities of a Nort sniper, who burst the seals on the command post so that the poisonous air rushed in.

Prog 230 began to fill us in on the Quartz Massacre, as Rogue half dreamt, half remembered what had happened. The entire G.I. regiment, fresh out of Milli-Com, made a mass capsule drop, from massive space-ships (reminiscent of the SHIELD heli-carrier). Each trooper was in his own individual armoured 'coffin', which would drop to the ground, decelerated by a rocket in its base, like a futuristic parachute drop. Trooper Gunnar was in the first capsule to drop, and his comrade, nicknamed 'Rogue', wouldn't be far behind.

Suddenly, the Norts opened up with shoulder-held coffin-breakers, wave after wave, turning the drop into a killing ground; capsule after capsule was blown apart high above the earth, the Genetic Infantrymen occupants killed before they could fire a shot in anger. Some did get through, though, and Gunnar came out fighting, buying time for the others. He only lasted a few vital seconds -- and died in Rogue's arms.

Gunnar's chip implant was already absorbing his personality matrix... Rogue had sixty seconds before the chip would start to destabilize.

"My gun, Rogue -- I want to be part of that", Gunnar said painfully. "C'mon, I'm finished -- get that damn chip out of my head..."

Ignoring the battle, Rogue got out his laser-scalpel, retrieved the precious bio-chip, and clicked it into Gunnar's rifle, then broke his own "empty" gun over his knee -- and the battle continued.

Prog 231 showed an armoured battle between Southern Carter-class tanks and Nort Blackmares, though the tanks looked large enough for Rogue to crawl up their gun-barrels--though he used a more direct method to help his fellow Southers. The

following week included a second flashback to the Quartz Massacre, on the third day of the battle, and showed Bagman's death and transplantation; again, it was his own backpack that Bagman was slotted into, rather than Rogue's.

After skipping one issue, Rogue Trooper was back in Prog 234, encountering the remains of an ambushed refugee column in a radiation-desert, and warning another column of their danger before decoying the Nort raiders into chasing him over a bomb he'd had planted. And another swift change of locale took him to the coast, and out onto the "scum seas". The sea was as poisonous as the chem-clouds over the land, and as harmless to Rogue, who boarded a small Norter warship, and, holding its crew at gun-point, had Helm narrate to them what happened on the final night of the Quartz Massacre.

At last the few surviving Gene Troopers received new orders from Milli-Com. Under the cover of a chemical smoke-screen, they were to break out in pairs, and rendezvous on the Orange Sea coast where a sea-shuttle was to be waiting.

The only two to make it there alive were Rogue and Helm. The shuttle was there; they waded out towards it, but before they reached it, Nort hydrofoils swooped in -- it was another trap! The shuttle was hit, and exploded. Helm was nearest to it, and was fatally wounded. Soon he was a bio-chip, which Rogue carefully slotted into his helmet.

The Nort kapten admitted that he had been there, moved by Helm's account, and told Rogue that, while he didn't know who the traitor in the Southern army had been, the man Rogue should seek was the Nort Grand-Admiral Hoffa, who was the man that the traitor had contacted. Rogue's concentration wavered, and the kapten then attacked, forcing him to drop Gunnar. Luckily, a missile-launcher was just behind him, and he was able to fire that instead. Rogue was the only one to wade away.

Prog 236 saw the debut of New Zealand-born artist Colin Wilson on Rogue Trooper. While Dave Gibbons created the character, as far as visuals are concerned, and is one of the best-respected of the current British artists, along with people like Brian Bolland and John Bolton, it's Colin who is the artist now most identified with this strip. His finer line has captured the spirit of Rogue fully as much as his predecessor, and, while Dave Gibbons' greater experience gave him the initial edge in story-telling ability and general layout, Colin's fresher approach, verve and imagination, coupled with his own unmistakable, European-influenced style, has got a lot to do with the continuing popularity of the Rogue Trooper strip.

From Grand-Admiral Hoffa, Rogue learns that the traitor he seeks is on the Milli-Com satellite Buzzard-Three, so called because it circles above the battlefields of Nu Earth. He reaches it on a supply shuttle, and confronts the generals there --but before he can find out which one's the bad guy, an alarm sounds. The satellite is under attack, an attack homing in on a beacon activated by the traitor.

Everyone heads for individual life-boats; they have, however, been sabotaged, and only by re-wiring the controls through Gunnar's bio-chip is Rogue able to reach the planet's surface safely. In the far distance, another life-boat lands. It must be the traitor, his tracks covered now, running for safety -- but for now he is out of Rogue's reach.

Dave Gibbons returned in Prog 239, with a change in the story-line as a new batch of (ordinary) young soldiers approach planet 97104/A (otherwise known as Nu Earth) from space, and begin to experience the rigours of war. Rogue Trooper himself only appears in the final panel of that week's episode, when only two of the rookies are still alive.

One, Kransky, had become a cold-blooded killer, while the other survivor, Field, was retreating into himself, walking through a nightmare and wishing he could wake up. Kransky, at the start of the second episode, recognizes Rogue as being wanted for questioning for the loss of the Buzzard-three satellite and the death of several Southern generals -- but Rogue saves Field's life. In the end, it comes to a gun-fight between the two survivors.

While Colin Wilson has drawn more episodes than anyone else of Rogue Trooper, the full art credits given with this article show that three fill-in artists have been used, as well as Dave Gibbons and the new alternating artist on Rogue, Cam Kennedy.

More recent stories of note have been in Progs 246 to 248, with art by Colin Wilson, where most of the action takes place inside a computer. Progs 251 to 253, again by Colin, have Rogue hot on the trail of the traitor, who has now taken refuge with the Norts and is interrogating

prisoners. Rogue disguises himself as an ordinary Souther (or "Sud") infantryman, and surrenders. He is about to confront the traitor, known as "the Buzzard" now, when the other prisoners begin an escape attempt--and Rogue has to choose between his revenge, and saving the prisoners.

Progs 260 to 262, drawn by Brett Ewins (parts one and two) and Eric Bradbury, a fine war artist not altogether at home with 2000AD (part three), had Bagman's bio-chip hit by a laser bolt, and acting unreliably; Prog 265 introduced Mister Bland and Mister Brass, a pair of highly professional looters, who greatly admire the valuable equipment that Rogue is carrying, in Cam Kennedy's debut on the series.

The first major Rogue Trooper serial began the following week: "All Hell on the Dix-I Front", which ran for 12 weeks and 48 pages, making it a possibility for reprinting as one of the Titan Books album series, especially as 32 pages of the story were drawn by Colin Wilson; a pity the other four instalments weren't, as while Cam Kennedy's 8 pages do capture the spirit of the strip, the two Brett Ewins fill-in episodes are sadly pedestrian and crude by comparison. However, both two-parters are "side-tales" that do not advance the main story, which is a powerful account of a Nort offensive that, despite all that Rogue and the poorly-prepared Southern can do, over-runs the whole of Dix-I. A chem-nurse called Sister Sledge accompanies Rogue for most of the time; she's a memorable character.

Rogue Trooper is one of the most popular series now running in 2000AD, after Judge Dredd and Robo-Hunter. This came as no surprise to the 2000AD editors, as it had been designed to be popular.

A reader survey almost eight months earlier had shown that the type of story most in demand was one taking place in a future war, and so that's what editor Steve McManus set out to give the paying customers. Pure future war series have been a rarity in 2000AD, compared with, for example, future sports. There was "Hammer-Stein's War Memoirs", some years before, set in Europe in the early 21st century; and more recently, "The V.C.s", featuring a group of starship troopers in a war against an invading alien race, which had been very popular, but had reached its natural conclusion.

The author of "The V.C.s", Gerry Finley-Day, was a natural choice for the new project. Dave Gibbons, who'd previously worked on Harlem's Heroes, Dan Dare, and Judge Dredd for 2000AD, had not worked for 2000AD for some time, due mainly to his work for Marvel Britain on the Doctor Who strip, but was once more available, and keen to create the "look" of a new hero from scratch -- while he was to draw the first few episodes, it was obvious that he wouldn't have the time to draw every episode once the backlog was used up, so a second artist to alternate with him had to be found as well.

"The V.C.s" had focussed on combat in space, with a whole team of heroes, so the decision was taken to set the new series on a planet, with a single hero. He was not to be an ordinary man, as on-planet war in future centuries would not be kind to ordinary men. A war like that would use biological and chemical weapons the way that old-fashioned wars had used bullets...from this it was a logical step to make the hero immune to such things, genetically engineered so that, unlike ordinary soldiers, he could survive in the war zone indefinitely.

The talking equipment came next. The obvious rationale for this would have been to make the things robotic, like Robo-Hunter's loquacious robo-cigar, or the Deathlok-style in-built computer advice service that M.A.C.H. One had enjoyed--but, feeling that there were quite enough robots in other 2000AD strips, the "bio-chip" idea was picked up instead.

Rogue Raider, as he then was, was thus given "dead buddies" who could help and advise him, and this tied in with the motivation for the series. His buddies had been killed in a massacre that left the hero as the only surviving Genetic Infantryman — was this the result of a betrayal? If so, Rogue would be seeking the traitor, unwilling to report back to his superiors until he had avenged his comrades. Otherwise, he could be betrayed again!

To emphasize the science fiction aspects and to avoid any contradictions and confusions with other 2000AD strips, the action was to take place not on Earth, but on Nu Earth, just one planet among many, far away, strategically placed close to a black hole, used for transporting ships instantaneously across half a galaxy.

Even in space, man's ultimate enemy is --man. The conflict on Nu Earth is North versus South, Norts and Suds, and in some ways it echoes the American Civil War fought on a global scale, though crossed with World War Two. "All Hell on the Dix-I Front" features Souther cities called Nu Atlanta, Harpo's Ferry, and Memfizz, and includes the song "Marching Through Nu Georgia" (as a Souther favourite?) and a reference to "the battle of Mak-Bull Run, when Nu Earth was still green, forty years ago." On the other hand, just across the sea from Harpo's Ferry is Araby, land of deserts and pyramids, while the land to the north of Dix-I goes by the name of Greater Nordland, with as the only city so far named Nu Nuremburg.

The Confederate States of America versus Nazi Germany? It seems that way, especially with the occasional Germanic words that the Nort troops use just prior to something terminal happening to their air supplies: kapten for captain, mensh for people, Kashan for a company or division of soldiers, atak as an expression of surprise, and nain for no. As you might expect, technologically, from such a confrontation, the Southern forces usually get the worst of any encounter, and the Norts are portrayed as vicious and lacking in honour; as the Unknown Soldier could tell you, though, one man in the right place at the right time can make the difference, and Rogue Trooper is that one man.

The recent twelve-part serial shows the vitality of the concept, which can work on any scale from an individual confrontation to a full-scale battle. The set-up isn't perfect, however, because of the limitations that are built into a hero-based war strip; reading through the series, one trips over shadows of Sergeant Rock and the Unknown Soldier in the shorter stories. While it's useful to step back and see the hero from outside occasionally, Gerry Finley-Day seems to repeat this rather too often, even in the middle of a serial, as a squad of rookies are introduced, only to get into trouble --at which point Rogue comes in and sets a good example. The idea of a hero trapped in an endless war he has no control over is fine, but I'm not sure if it can carry a similarly endless series. Some conclusion has to be reached, you can't just have Helm comment that "it's a lousy war, but someone's got to fight it."

As it is, the series is original and striking, and a worthy addition to the 2000AD line-up. Its sometimes unromantic and level-headed approach to its subject makes a good balance to the often almost overpowering comedy of Robo-Hunter, Ace Trucking, and even Judge Dredd; Rogue is an asset to 2000AD, and one that it will be very difficult to replace.

-RUAN LANIHORNE

An early visualisation of the story's hero, before the final "look" of the character had been agreed, by Dave Gibbons. His final interpretation of Rogue Trooper contributed greatly to the strip's initial success.

ART CREDITS ON "ROGUE TROOPER":

Dave Gibbons: Progs 228-232, 234, 235, 239, 240, 249, 250.
Colin Wilson: Progs 236-238, 241, 246-248, 251-253, 258, 266-270, 275-277.
Mike Dorey: Progs 242, 243, 254-257.
Brett Ewins: Progs 260, 262, 273, 274, 1983 Annual.
Eric Bradbury: Prog 262, 1982 Special.
Cam Kennedy: Progs 265, 271, 272, 278.

There is no Rogue Trooper episode in Progs 233, 244, 245, 259, 263, or 264.

Dave Gibbons lettered the episode in Prog 228, Tom Frame Prog 234, and Tony Jacob Progs 258 & 261, while Alan Moore scripted the episode in the 1983 2000AD Annual -- otherwise, all episodes have been lettered by Bill Nuttall, and of course scripted by Gerry Finley-Day.

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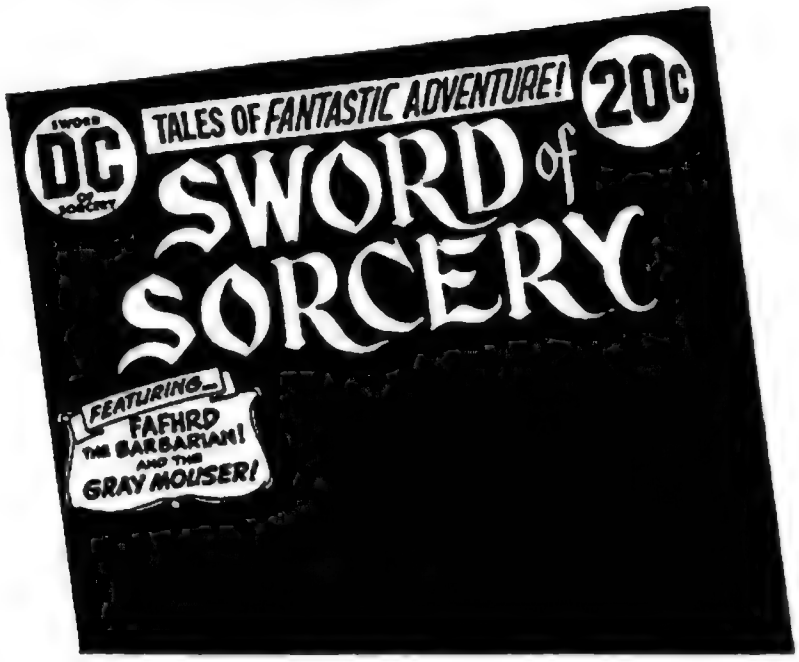


by John Hay

The story begins in the office of a private investigator, one spring morning on Earth-1. The private eye, Jonny Double, is not there; his visitors, a glamorous brunette in a white mini-dress and her mentor, an old blind oriental, instead find danger, in the form of two knife-wielding Tibetan assassins.

The old man is called I-Ching, and his leggy disciple is Diana Prince, who, at the time of this story (1972), has lost her Amazon powers, but is still with good reason called Wonder Woman. The battle, consequently, is short--and the assassins kill themselves, prefering destruction to capture. However, as he dies, one of them whispers "F-fist of...flame--"

Luckily, I-Ching knows of this. It is "a giant ruby said to drive man MAD with greed! A CURSED stone...unholy -- EVIL!"

He also knows where it's to be found, which is lucky, as Diana soon receives a note telling her that if she wants to keep her friend Double alive, she must get the Fist of Flame. After selling her boutique to raise the money for a couple a plane-fares, Di and Ching are soon on an airliner heading for Tibet. And on the same plane is another woman with blonde hair who seems strangely familiar.

The trip high into the mountains with a native guide; the sudden snowstorm that soon becomes a blizzard; the disappearance of the guide; the shelter of a cave that turns out to be a tunnel through the heart of the mountain, opening on a pocket of warmth and beauty, a hidden green valley unknown to the outer world. Can this be Shangri-La?

Perhaps, and perhaps not. Anyway, Ching and Diana see a huge green statue of the Buddha across at the far end of the valley --and in its forehead is the jewel they seek! Our heroic thieves hurry towards it, using their martial arts prowess on any locals who got in their way. Despite the intervention of a giant swordsman, Diana climbs the idol, and plucks forth the jewel, only to be mesmerised by its baleful glow.

The story could have ended there, but help is at hand, in the form of a kick on the head from a rope-descending Catwoman, so that the ruby rolls free. "A fitting object for my RETURN to crime", she purrs softly, and grabs it... only to in turn fall into its thrall.

Diana (Wonder Woman) Prince and Selina (Catwoman) Kyle regain consciousness to find that their captors have suspended them in special harnesses over a deep, blazing pit. Each holds a sword; they are told that the one who cuts the other's lifelines will live, the other die.

However, Diana cheats the locals out of their simple pleasure by swiftly cutting Selina's ropes, and doing a trapeze act that swings them both to safety. Together, the two women free I-Ching, and carefully put the ruby into Diana's handbag without touching it. Suddenly, the very fabric of reality shimmers and blurs, and the three figures fall across the dimensions... to land beneath a very different sky, with a brawny, sword-carrying barbarian and his smaller, grey-clad companion looking down at them!

So ended WONDER WOMAN #201, written & edited by Denny O'Neil and drawn by Dick Giordano. Its final panel was the first appearance in comics of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, Fritz Leiber's celebrated sword & sorcery heroes, and our first sight of the world of Nehwon.

Issue 202 had Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser sharing the cover with Diana and Catwoman, and this was indeed a shared adventure, drawn again by Giordano and scripted, in his comic writing debut, by sf novelist Samuel R. Delany.

After the usual "get-acquainted" comic book fight, the heroes compared notes. Fafhrd and the Mouser were searching for a great sapphire called the Eye of the Ocean, which I-Ching was able to tell them is in "strange occult conjunction" with the Fist of Flame. "Gazing into one, you can see what is before the other." Also, both gems occasionally phase from Earth-1 to Nehwon and back, taking along anyone near them.

They gaze into the Fist, and see the image of, not the mountain sorcerer that the two swordsmen had been hoping to take the Eye from, but Jonny Double, who was at that time filling in for the temporarily deceased Steve Trevor as Diana's prospective man-friend. And I-Ching also

senses that someone else is there -- his evil daughter, Lu Shan. The Eye is on Earth...

Nevertheless, our band of five decide to continue on the route Fafhrd and the Mouser had been following, to the stronghold of the sorcerer Gawron. When they split up to infiltrate the fortress, it is only natural that Catwoman and Mouser go off together, following a mouse that I-Ching has persuaded to act as their guide--though perhaps this bit of whimsy is taken to extremes when with cat-like enthusiasm they leap right into the middle of the sorcerer's laboratory, after the diminutive rodent.

Meanwhile Fafhrd and Diana fight their way in through the front entrance, and its numerous guards, followed by I-Ching carrying the Fist, just as the sapphire Eye phases back to Nehwon in front of them, bringing Lu Shan, three of her men, and Jonny Double...

The level of mayhem escalates. Although originally hired to steal the Fist by Lu Shan, Catwoman stays loyal to Diana, as Diana had saved her life, and she tells her so. Ching picks up the Eye, and takes it and the Fist to Gawron's necromantic machine, which, powered by their special vibrations, opens a portal between the two worlds. Double, Fafhrd, Diana, Ching, Catwoman, and the Mouser leap through to the safety of Double's office on Earth-1, and the Mouser takes back one of the gems as he goes, leaving Lu Shan stranded.

So, the story ends where it started; the Gray Mouser and Fafhrd resolve to take a look at this strange world, but a quick confrontation with a noisy, fume-filled New York street is more than they bargained for, and no sooner have they expressed a desire to return to Nehwon--than they vanish.

Those were two of the five issues of WONDER WOMAN that Denny O'Neil edited, after Dorothy Woolfolk's two-issue fill-in, and before Robert Kanigher's bizarre eight-issue red kryptonite delusion (or whatever); the two issues before both had

covers by sf painter Jeff Jones, and the last one was that rare breed, a "special women's lib issue" with a female bondage cover, scripted by Samuel R. Delany, so, while short, O'Neil's editorial reign was certainly interesting.

That final issue's text page, however, carried the news that Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser were a hit! "The response to the sword-slinging pair was so great that our leader and resident father figure, Carmine Infantino, decreed Faf and the Mouser be given their own mag. We've just completed the first issue and we're tremendously excited, and we expect to have lots of company, once readers see it. If you have a taste for fantasy in the grand manner--full of evil magicians and monsters and gloomy castles and dark spirits and, most of all, action--you'll want to give SWORD OF SORCERY a look."

Wow! When DC move, they move fast. That was only two months after the two heroes had first appeared, unless you count the brief final-panel shot in the previous issue...the comic could have been on sale for only hours when Denny wrote that, and he'd already completed the first new issue! I wouldn't say that he was intentionally misleading us, rather he was indulging in the traditional hype. The new book had been planned in advance, and the guest shot in WONDER WOMAN was being used in the same way as the 16-page free inserts are used now, to introduce the new characters and make them familiar to their prospective readers. And if you doubt me, check out the half-page below the end of the team-up story; at the top of the page, the heroes phase back to Nehwon, and beneath that the announcement is made that they are to star in SWORD OF SORCERY, coming soon -- watch for it!

And five months after their co-starring rôle in WONDER WOMAN #202, three months after Denny O'Neil and the Amazing Amazon parted company, Fafhrd and the Mouser did indeed return in SWORD OF SORCERY #1, cover-dated March, 1973, edited by Denny, who also acted as writer.

The first issue was a 23-page adaptation of "The Price of Pain-Ease" which, as the last but one story in the second of Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd/Mouser books, "Swords Against Death", is peculiarly effective. However, this effectiveness depends on knowledge of the events that have been previously narrated. The pain that Fafhrd and his under-sized confrere had wished eased was the death of the first loves of their lives, Vlana and Ivrian--but they, and their shades, are totally missing from the comics version.

Mike Kaluta drew the cover. Inside, the penciller was young Howard Chaykin, with inks credited to the Crusty Bunkers, who included Neal Adams.

The story begins in a tavern called the Jade Turtle Inn, where the book's two heroes are relaxing with two Lankhmarian young ladies, and ale. However, all is not quiet for long; the Thieves' Guild has put a price on their heads for unlicensed thievery, and six bravos attempt to earn it. However, Fafhrd manages to loose a store of wine-barrels on their heads, and when the local peace officers arrive, they make like a banana, and split.

They now need to become unobtrusive for a while, and, wandering through Lankhmar, come across the palace of Duke Danius,

which is deserted since he's gone off to his country mansion, so Fafhrd announces.

However, no sooner have they broken in and made themselves comfortable than the Duke, and his archers, make an unexpected return. They're trapped in a walled courtyard, when miraculously one big, saddled unicorn appears out of thin air (well, Denny thinks it's one in the captions, but Howard draws Faf and the Mouser one each). They mount, leap the wall, and are carried out of Lankhmar, across the salt marsh and the sinking land, to a strange cavern, where the steeds vanish as quickly as they'd appeared, letting their riders land with a bump.

They enter the cave, and encounter the two eerie sorcerers, Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes, who give Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser a task: to journey beyond Ilthmar, into the Shadowland, to the castle of the lord Death himself, there to find, upon the throne, the mask of Death. Ningauble and Sheelba squabble as to which of them should actually have the mask, and Sheelba charges the Mouser to bring it to him, and Ningauble orders Fafhrd to bring it to him.

Off they ride on their re-materialized mounts -- but we haven't seen the last of Duke Danius, who has ridden to Ilthmar to pick up a war axe which a one-eyed witch has placed spells upon, so that nothing can withstand it. Just to make sure that we know who are the heroes and who is the villain, he rewards her not with the agreed thousand pieces of silver, but with one high-velocity arrow.

Leaving his archers behind, Danius takes up his new axe, mounts his horse, and rides for Shadowland. For years he has lived in constant fear of dying, so now, with his invincible war-axe, he is off to slay Death himself!

The Gray Mouser and Fafhrd penetrate the sunless realm of Shadowland, and soon reach Death's palace, whereupon the two unicorns vanish once more. Luckily, Death himself isn't in sight, but his mask is, so the two heroes fight a brisk duel to decide which of them will take back the mask to his wizardly mentor.

The duel is curtailed by the arrival of Duke Danius' war-axe, which whirs through the air between them, and ends up sunk in the wall above Death's throne, having split the mask in twain.

Danius appears to have been taking lessons from Thor, as the axe immediately flies back to his hand. He announces his intention of "warming up" for his killing of Death by practising on our heroes.

Fafhrd moves forward -- but as soon as his broadsword touches the enchanted axe, his blade melts, a night-coloured aura surrounds the barbarian, racking him with agony...and he drops, unconscious.

The Mouser, more prudent, sends forward his blade without himself attached, but Danius halts it in mid-air, and sends it back, hilt-first, knocking the Mouser out.

Just as Danius is about to slit the throats of his helpless foes, he hears a sound... the light fades... the stink of decay fills his nostrils...and the figure of Death comes into sight. Duke Danius, clutching his war-axe, attacks -- but his magicked blade has no effect. Death is stronger than mere man-spawned magicks... a dark-shrouded hand reaches forward...a gasp...a rattle...and silence...

While Death is thus occupied, the Gray Mouser rouses his barbarian partner, and they sneak out. They walk away from the palace, towards the borders of Shadowland.

Fafhrd is disconsolate; they may have escaped Death, but they have yet to face the wrath of Ningauble and Sheelba, as they have failed in their mission. But, grinning, the Mouser brings out from under his cloak the mask's two halves; they express the hope that each wizard will be willing to settle for half the prize, and walk on towards the light.

On the editorial page, Denny O'Neil gives an admirable discourse on his two heroes and their world, giving all proper credit to their creator, Fritz Leiber, and expressing the conviction that the result of his adaptations "will be the most exciting fantasy ever put between the covers of a comic book."

He also mentions that "whenever I've had to change any of the Fafhrd tales to fit them into a picture format, I've felt as though I'd scrawled a moustache on the Mona Lisa", and he pledges "We'll change Fritz's work as little as possible, because we love it, because it would be silly to imagine we can improve on greatness, and because, for the first time in our comics careers, we're approaching a project with genuine reverence."

Noble words, but it's a pity that they appear in the same issue as his version of "The Price of Pain-Ease", from which he has carelessly ripped the heart, and the guts, so that the title's meaning is entirely missing from this adaptation.

I have no quarrel with the four-page fight scene that Denny started his story with; this is, after all, comics. Having Faf and the Mouser invade the palace of Duke Danius, only to be surprised by his unexpected return, is rather clumsy, and much less fun than the true account--but in its favour it does bring Duke Danius more into the centre of the story.

Actually, it wasn't the Duke's palace they annexed -- rather, it was a wooden garden-house in the grounds of his real palace, and, with the assistance of about 40 other tavern-goers, they carried it away to the far side of Lankhmar, and lived in it for months!

However, they made the mistake of having it put down on the ashes of the house in which their first true loves had died most nastily, and in time the ghosts of Ivrian and Vlana appeared to them. The pain of their great loss was still in the

heart of both heroes -- that was the pain that had to be eased, and the service the two wizards demanded was the price.

I can't fault O'Neil for having the two heroes confront Sheelba and Ningauble together, rather than each alone with his particular wizardly mentor; a necessary simplification, although it makes their rivalry for possession of the mask seem no more than a moment's petulance. The heroes travelled separately to Death's palace, encountering in Shadowland each the shade of his loved one, substantial, though slate-faced and vacant-eyed, within Death's dark domain -- powerful scenes, but since the comic reader had never come across these girls in life, also not necessary to advance the plot, while the Comics Code might have considered them to be zombies rather than ghosts, and hence not appropriate for a Code-approved book.

Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser met as their horses, not prone to vanishing like Denny O'Neil's more capricious unicorns, trotted into Death's palace.

I must admit that, in comic terms, the story is improved by Denny's addition of the scene in which Duke Danius acquired his "irresistable" war-axe -- it's better than just having Sheelba tell the Mouser of the Duke's intentions, and the power that the war-axe is alleged to have gives Danius reason to think that he can succeed in his crazy venture, while the killing of the witch helps to reassure readers that Danius is a villain, worthy of the fate he so eagerly rides towards.

But inside the palace, things run much as before. The heroes are almost defeated by the Duke's insane strength and speed, until Death's arrival--Duke Danius dies, and the Mouser and Fafhrd each snatch up half the mask, and ride away as if they were followed by all the hordes of hell.

Neither wizard is greatly mollified by half a mask, and between them they utterly destroy the garden-house; but by meeting the shades of Vlana and Ivrian, and the adventures surrounding those events, both heroes find that their pains have been eased, though, since they must now do much work for Sheelba and Ningauble, they have still to pay the whole price.

The second issue has a cover pencilled by Howard Chaykin, and inked by Berni Wrightson, while inside is a 24-page adaptation of "Thieves House" by O'Neil, Chaykin, and Neal Adams and the Crusty Bunkers, a story now entitled "Revenge of the Skull of Jewels".

While Fritz Leiber's original story of "The Price of Pain-Ease" only ran to 14 pages in the second book in the Fafhrd & Mouser series, "Swords Against Death", the original story of "Thieves' House" takes up 37 pages, earlier in that same volume, so a less faithful adaptation is to be expected.

The skull Ohmphal, of the Master Thief Ohmphal, with great rubies for eyes, together with one pair of jeweled hands, was stolen from the Thieves' Guild many centuries ago by the priests of Votishal --and now the Guild wants it back! Fat Fissif is chosen to arrange this, thanks to his skill at cheating and betrayal; he enlists Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, but, once they have slain the guardian monster and sprung the most cunning lock, Fissif practises his own specialities, and runs back to Thieves' House with the skull and hands, leaving the two heroes too drugged with wine to catch him.

But they do follow, and enter Thieves' House, braving its labyrinthine corridors and many traps--and find a room in which sits Krovas, leader of the Guild, while a woman, startled by their sudden appearance runs across to some tapestries, and vanishes behind them--carrying the skull and hands.

Krovas still sits unmoving -- he had prised loose some jewels from the hands, which had thereupon strangled the life from him. Other thieves come in, but our heroes fight their way free, and run out into the corridor. They get separated, however; the Mouser gets away, but Fafhrd bangs his head, falls through a false wall-panel, and ends up in a dim, long-forgotten cellar, where lie the other skulls of the thieves of past centuries. They tell him that he must bring back the skull of their brother by the following night, or his life is forfeit. Still dazed, he finds his way back up to the inhabited levels of the house -- but is soon captured.

The Guild sends a note to the Mouser, telling him they have his comrade, and will kill him unless he brings them the skull, as they assume he has it. Luckily, he has an idea where it may be, and early the following night ventures forth in the guise of an old fortune-teller. He calls on the house adjoining Thieves' House, in which dwells the woman Ivlis, and gives her a fortune-reading which, by mentioning bones, causes her to look at the place she had hidden the skull. It was Ivlis that he and Fafhrd had seen in Krovas' room the previous night -- and there is a secret door from her room to his.

He ties her up, and retrieves the skull, then uses the secret door. Thrusting the skull through a gap in the tapestry, and using a suitably sepulchral voice, he tricks the Guild's new leader into having Fafhrd untied.

However, Ivlis, freed by her maid, pricks the Mouser with a pin, making him drop the skull and spoiling the deception --a fight ensues, and, with Korvas dead, Ivlis soon finds that she must fight on the same side as Fafhrd and the Mouser, particularly as the wind has slammed the secret door shut behind them, cutting off their escape!

The midnight deadline arrives; the ruby eyes of the skull begin to glow, and it clamps its teeth. A thief cries out in fear, but this only annoys the new leader of the Guild, Sleyvas, and with his sword he shatters the skull.

Omphal's brothers materialize. They are angry with Sleyvas, and the bony hands of Omphal clasp around his throat now, ever tighter. The air goes black, and Fafhrd, Ivlis, and the Mouser flee, accompanied by the screams of terrified thieves. They gain the safety of Ivlis' house, and the adventure is over.

Fritz Leiber concludes "Thereafter it was noted in Lankhmar that thieves were fewer. And it was rumoured that the Thieves' Guild conducted strange rites at full moon, descending into deep cellars and worshipping some sort of ancient gods. It was even said that they gave these gods, whoever they were, one-third of all they stole."

It was a very faithful adaptation,

except that the original Leiber story began with some background, and planning of the skull's theft from the temple, while Denny O'Neil very wisely brought in the actual theft, with Fafhrd in mortal combat with the guardian-creature to give a suitably action-packed splash page. In the original story, this theft takes place off-stage.

SWORD OF SORCERY #3 had only half a page of letters, allowing a 23½-page story by Denny O'Neil, not an adaptation, called "Betrayal", pencilled by Howard Chaykin and inked by about a dozen of his artist pals, including Berni Wrightson (about half, according to The Comic Reader), Mike Kaluta, and Walt Simonson. The Overlord of Lankhmar, Glipkerio, sends the Mouser and Fafhrd off to rescue a princess, in an ornate hot-air balloon airship made by the court magician, Kohn, who also gives them a pack of cards which, if sprinkled with water from a cloud, will be of greater use than a regiment, and Lissa, turned by her jealous necromancer husband into a mute bird-girl, magically able to locate anything, or anyone. The pirates who abducted Princess Shada are easily found, and, thanks to Lissa and the deck of cards, vanquished...there is, however, a suitably ironic plot-twist at the end. Despite the fact that some aspects of the plot are not entirely original, I feel that, if Fritz Leiber had written an original story about these events, then Denny O'Neil's scripting here would have been a worthy adaptation.

DC comics at this time suddenly dropped the number of story pages drastically, so SWORD OF SORCERY #4 only had 20 pages of adventure, split between a 14-page version of "The Cloud of Hate" by Denny O'Neil, Howard Chaykin, and yet another motley crew of inkers, and an original 6-page tale of Young Fafhrd, "The Prophecy", by

O'Neil and Walt Simonson.

"The Cloud of Hate" leads off "Swords in the Mist", the third volume in Fritz Leiber's series, and is 15 pages long; a gem of a story, but not perhaps ideal for adaptation to comics. That's probably why Denny merely borrowed Leiber's title, some of the characters, and the idea of a sentient fog emanating from the Temple of Hate and its worshippers. The back-up story involves a 15-year-old Fafhrd with a most formidable monster which, thanks to a prophecy made by a passing sage, he is able to defeat. The only thing that makes me reluctant to accept it as a "cannonical" part of the saga is that Faf's girl-friend here is Aynsa, not the Mara he's involved with in the 1970 "The Snow Women" novella that forms the first part of "Swords and Deviltry", which tells tales of our two heroes before their meeting, and of the meeting itself.

Howard Chaykin left the series after #4, in order to devote his attention to "Iron-Wolf", his own creation, which debuted in WEIRD WORLDS #8, out at the same time as SWORD OF SORCERY #5, and is still to be encountered on occasion, under his new name of Cody Starbuck. Who can blame him? It's always nicer to work on one's own creations, and, besides, SWORD OF SORCERY would be ending after its fifth issue, unless sales reports came in that would persuade DC to reprieve it.

The fifth, and last, issue led off with a 14-page adaptation of "The Sunken Land" by O'Neil, Walt Simonson, and Al Milgrom; the story takes place between "Thieves' House" and "The Price of Pain-Ease", so Denny was continuing to ignore Leiber's chronology, but he followed the actual story well enough. The catching of a fish with a ring-key in its belly became a wrestling match for Fafhrd with a giant octopus, but such are the ways of splash pages. Faf gets separated from the Mouser and their boat, and picked up by a long-boat on a crazy, impossible mission to sack a city that sunk to the floor of the ocean centuries before—but the land has once again risen. The Mouser's rather minor part in this story is expanded by O'Neil at the end, but it's a worthy evocation of a haunting story.

To give equal time for Fafhrd's grey-clad companion, "The Mouse Alone" filled the last six pages, scripted by sf author George Effinger, inked by Al Milgrom, and pencilled by Jim Starlin, who was at that time five issues into his run on CAPTAIN MARVEL. The story fits in neatly before the character's Leiber debut in "Swords and Deviltry", as Mouse, not yet Mouser, receives an invaluable (but expensive) lesson from a master thief. The "Conan cameo" that Overstreet refers to can be found in this story, on the third panel of the second page.

And so the series ended. As with so many comics over the years, sales weren't high enough to persuade DC to persevere; since, presumably, a royalty had to be paid to Fritz Leiber, this book was more vulnerable than most.

SWORD OF SORCERY was one of DC's many rivals for Marvel's CONAN, a book that had started in 1970, and, despite poor initial sales (can we point a moral there, that persistence is more likely to be rewarded than is pusillanimity?), had gone on to become a popular monthly comic title. At the end of 1972, when SWORD OF SORCERY was being planned, Barry Smith was still Conan's main artist (issue 25, in which Barry's barbarian was subjected to those fateful gamma rays that transformed him into Buscema-Conan, was cover-dated April 1973), so it was the stylish, decorative Smith style that influenced this series, allowing Howard Chaykin and his friends more artistic freedom than newcomers to the world of comics usually get on their early assignments.

Chaykin's art is renowned for the wide variety of thigh-high boots that can be seen on the characters, and for a tendency to give a worm's-eye view of proceedings, though this last isn't noticeable here. The wide variety of inkers, necessitated by the rush to get the book produced, makes it very interesting for the artist-spotters among us, and gives some nice effects, though it doesn't always help the art continuity—compare the two girls on the first issue's splash page with their appearance in the background of the third panel of page two, where they're inked in the Adams style! Chaykin draws movement well, and swordplay, and indeed sorcery; here he was inventive, he was enthusiastic and eager to make his mark on comics; the costumes, other than the boots (though some are only calf-length, I must admit) are inventive and, on the women usually bizarrely decorative. Yes, Denny O'Neil chose the best artist for the series — by no means a Barry Smith imitator, but a man with his own vision, and plenty of style.

Walt Simonson's first "Manhunter" solo story in DETECTIVE came out a month after his first SWORD OF SORCERY story, so he too was only just making his mark when he was collared for this book—again, a good choice, and in the "Young Fafhrd" story his strong design sense and inventive use of panel layouts stand out. The final issue's main story is a little more traditional in these respects, but it is still very fine work, with the "Sunken Land" sequences eerily splendid, as they should be.

Jim Starlin's smoother, more detailed style on the last story of all makes a pleasant change. It's typical Starlin work, with characters that are so much Starlin that you forget there was a writer involved in their creation too. A fitting finale for a book that was, in the short run, pretty darn good.

I've been critical of Denny O'Neil in places; he's a variable writer. When he's very good, he has done excellent work, as on the updating of Superman and his Green Lantern collaborations with Neal Adams, but when he's bad, he adds Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter, to his repertoire. On SWORD OF SORCERY, he set himself a pretty high standard, and for most of the time he kept to it. I have reservations about either his adaptations of "Cloud of Hate" and "Price of Pain-Ease", or his choosing of them to adapt in the first place — if he couldn't adapt them without taking grave liberties with their construction, why use them at all? But, generally, I'd put Denny's work here, as writer and in particular as editor, among his best work for DC.

Why did the title not attract enough readers? Really, five issues is no time at all, as, in those days before direct sales, it means that the title was canned when only the first issue's sales figures were known in any detail. It was different, yes—lighter, more magical than the Conan stories, but that's the whole point of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. They are men of wit in a magical world that, it's said, exists within a bubble floating up through a watery cosmos—they're not grim and grimy barbarians, even if Fafhrd can look the part, and make jests about it. They don't hack and slash their way to a king's throne, a wizard's treasure room, or a courtesan's bed...

Robert E. Howard was a man who could write good, strong pulp fiction, and he deserves his success — it's a shame that he lived for so short a time. Nobody could have called him America's greatest fantasy writer, though; but today that title must surely belong to Fritz Leiber.

And he's one of the best sf authors, too, with a number of Hugos to his name. Besides the six books of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser ("Swords & Deviltry", "Swords Against Death", "Swords in the Mist", "Swords Against Wizardry", "The Swords of Lankhmar", and "Swords & Ice Magic"), I'd recommend in particular "The Big Time", & "Gather Darkness"—to which Denny O'Neil would add "Conjure Wife".

I wish that this particular comics series had gone on longer; it was good while it lasted. What more can I say?

It is intended that "In The Short Run" be a fairly regular series in Bem, and I hope to cover other comics series that didn't live to a ripe old age—there are, after all, plenty of them to choose from. Your reactions, and your suggestions for future coverage, will be most gratefully received at our English address. I don't want to end with a threat, but if we do not get lots of useful suggestions, I may well be seen re-reading my set of Mighty Marvel's SHOGUN WARRIORS... -JOHN HAY

THE VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAT BOYETTE & FRED HIMES

CONDUCTED BY
HOWARD LEROY DAVIS

Boyette and Himes draw each other; standing, Himes by Boyette; seated, Boyette by Himes.

A few years ago, when I prepared a list of my ten favourite all-time comic items I listed among them CHARLTON PREMIERE #2: "Children of Doom" as the best one-shot. It was credited to Sergius O'Shaugnessy, writer, and Pat Boyette, artist (and edited by Dick Giordano). A beautiful comic... limited use of colour... moody, toned, black-and-white carried the main thrust of the art.

I have listened intently to Sergius O'Shaugnessy speak of his attitudes at a New York convention or two...you may know him better as Denny O'Neil... but Pat Boyette has always seemed to be a remote, unapproachable, mystery man.

Boyette was unknown, unknowable, mainly because he lived in San Antonio, Texas--over 2000 miles from New York.

Travelling on a business-vacation, I finally got to San Antonio. In that beautiful city I contrived to meet both Pat Boyette and his partner, Fred Himes, who Mark Evanier once described to me as one of the most talented cartoonists working in the humour area -- he has been responsible for many of the Hanna-Barbera related comics.

Before coming into comics, Boyette was a television communicator...specifically a news anchorman... for many years. As could be expected, Pat's stentorian voice dominated much of the interview.

Boyette on San Antonio as a home base for cartoonists:

"Let me tell you about San Antonio. At one time, this was a haven for syndicated cartoonists. V.J. Hamlin was here...came from Fort Worth, Texas, originally. Did you know that "Alley Oop" was originally a cat? V.J. started it as a cartoon about the Fort Worth Cats baseball team. Roy Crane (creator of Wash Tubbs, Captain Easy, and Buz Sawyer) moved here from Sweetwater, Texas. Leslie Turner, who succeeded Crane on "Captain Easy", Charlie Crumm, Monty Barrett who did "Jane Arden", Laredo Crockett... They were all cartoonists who lived in San Antonio.

"San Antonio was always a centre for artists. I suppose it was something about being on a frontier, and being a free spirit... an area attitude that excited the talented.

"The New York attitude and approach to comics is different from a Southwestern-Western approach."

To which, Fred Himes adds, "Primarily, it seems from our perspective, Northern artists and writers work together a lot. And when deadline problems occur, they just repeat themselves.

"Sometimes, I'd get a script and call Pat about it to ask if he didn't do the same thing a couple of months ago. Often he did."

Boyette on attitudes:

"Most comic people from the East take themselves, and comics, so damned seriously. I read THE COMICS JOURNAL, and I can't believe that those guys are talking about... and having emotional apoplexy over...comics! My attitude toward comics has never been that.

"I see everything in comics today but FUN. Where the hell is this enjoyment I knew in comics as a kid? The excitement of drawing and reading the comics?"

Years ago, when Pat had discussed with Fred Himes the idea of working in comics, Fred had told Pat that he didn't understand what it was all about--that superheroes <u>are</u> comics...and that this is the comics business. Remembering that, Pat commented:

"I had always considered the superhero to be the ultimate absurdity. When Superman came out, we were building toward a dreadful, menacing war. Our psyche probably needed something powerful and super then, but we haven't needed him since.

"As a young man, it irritated the hell out of me and insulted me that he could put on glasses and a suit and no-one would recognize him. On this concept (alone), anything these people (the story creators) would say became ridiculous.

"When they came out with the Batman TV series, I said that the writers would never have the courage to write the same cornpone dialogue again, but..."

The subject turned to comics realism. Pat picked up on a turn of phrase:

"What is 'keeping it realistic' in comics? We live in a world where we are smothered with cinemascope screen images, 21 inch TV pictures, on-the-spot TV news coverage of live-action, look-alike people doing real things. The one place where people can express individuality and imagination is in comics. So what is the answer (of the editors & publishers)? They have their characters do 'real things'...and trace a photo novella!

"Let me clarify... I'm not talking about the quality of the work of other creators. I'm talking attitude.

"It's that seriousness which bewilders me. If a guy wants to put a character in a funny suit with a pair of glasses and say, 'Gee, nobody recognizes me', okay. But when he presents it as something

believable I have to wonder what his motives are... because one of us is squirrelly!"

Our conversation turned to Pat Boyette's first comic work, for Charlton. Did he remember the first story he drew?

"Yeah. 'Spacious Rooms For Rent'..."

Was it a ghost story?

"I don't know what it was. I never found out. But I drew this darn thing and sent it back, and they sent me a check. Dick Giordano then writes me a letter and says 'Can you do a superhero?' Superhero? Of course! And he sent me 'Peacemaker'."

Then 'Peacemaker' was the second thing that you ever drew?

"Yes, with the possible exception of a little war story I knocked out."

Pat Boyette continued to draw for Charlton for several years. Many Charlton ghost stories and war stories bear his imprint. Despite his personal disdain for superheroes, he drew Thunderbolt, Flash Gordon, and The Phantom--in fact, Boyette drew the Phantom comic books for several years, until the character's writer and creator, Lee Falk, objected to Pat's unorthodox style and asked that he be removed from the assignment.

When Dick Giordano left Charlton for National/DC, he brought along several of his Charlton staff: among others, Denny O'Neil, Jim Aparo -- and Pat Boyette. Pat was asked to do BLACKHAWK, which was seriously behind schedule at the time.

He received the script for the Blackhawk story through the mail on the day that the finished art was supposed to be in New York!

Usually a quick artist anyway, Pat exceeded all expectation by producing 7 pages per day to get the job out. Although Pat was assured by Dick Giordano that any fault in the work caused by the hectic pace would be forgiven and forgotten, apparently the higher echelons at National didn't feel that way: Boyette was given no further important assignments from DC.

The Blackhawk script was Boyette's first experience with the 'Marvel System' of preparing comic books; it was one of DC's first experiments with the system, also. Instead of a full script, he received a 5-page story synopsis in typed text form. He then had to break down the story as he saw fit.

Although he was generally happy with his Blackhawk outing--especially considering the great pressure under which the work was done--he was not happy with the 'Marvel System'.

Pat's second brush with this system of producing comics came in the form of an assignment from Marvel. The system, and the Marvel Universe's continuity flow, left him mystified.

"I didn't understand the comic (Bloodstone, in MARVEL PRESENTS #1) when I drew it, and I did not understand it when I saw it printed. It was really unbelievable. I was told that it was the first story about the character, but so much was missing that I was sure that there must have been other stories that I had not seen.

"And, of course, that was the last thing I did for Marvel...for which, I am thankful."

Sensing that some of his critical comments might be misunderstood, he added:

"Let me make one thing perfectly clear here. As we sit here in this interview, I am in no way putting myself in the same category as the Joe Kuberts, the Gene Colans, the Alex Toths, the Frank Thornes ...or any of those other guys that I consider so superior. I'm strictly a guy who loves to draw pictures. I get terribly bored with the fact that everybody has 5 fingers. On occasion, a guy should have two...or one."

Boyette never redraws his page layouts. As freshly bizarre as some of them are, all flow directly onto the page. He feels that his flair for the dramatic layout is not especially a 'natural' talent.

"I don't do anything naturally. There are just some things I don't have to work as hard at as others. My approach to anatomy is absolutely atrocious -- quite offensive."

A panel from "Children of Doom", in CHARLTON PREMIERE Vol. 2 No. 2, Nov 1967; copyright (c) 1967 Charlton Comics Group, copyright (c) 1982 Charlton Publications Inc.

A plate from the "Day of the Beast" portfolio, by Pat Boyette. Copyright (c) 1981 Stendec Communications.

Examining the Boyette comics, including his Charlton work, stories for both DC and Marvel, and some noteworthy work for the Warren magazines, including covers, the mood is what comes through. Not the faces, not the anatomy, not the action, but the mood. On having this pointed out to him, Pat said, "That's the only thing that's important to me!"

Samples I was shown of the most recent Pat Boyette work show me that such a statement is too much of a simplification to be true. They are fascinating paintings which illustrate biblical prophecies. Boyette and Himes are publishing these as plates, with text explaining the prophecy and the painting reproduced side-by-side. (The set of 13 plates plus folder, "Day of the Beast", is published by Stendec Communications, 333 Valley Hi Drive, Suite 2104, San Antonio, Texas, 78227, U.S.A. The price is not known at this writing.)

In addition to this portfolio, Boyette and Himes are working on a comic which will be published by New Media, and another which they will publish themselves. The latter was to include work by Wally Wood and Alex Toth. -HOWARD LEROY DAVIS

REVIEW SECTION

2000AD ANNUAL 1983
Strontium Dog: "Incident at the Back o' Beyond" by Staccato & Robin Smith; Nemesis: "The Secret Life of the Blitzspear" by Pat Mills & Kevin O'Neill; Ro-Busters: "Old Red Eyes is Back" by Alan Moore & Bryan Talbot; Rogue Trooper by Moore & Brett Ewins; Judge Dredd: "Law of the Jungle" by Staccato & Emberton; Tharg: "Leave it to, um...Burt" by Q. Twerk; "Silicon Soul", a Ro-Jaws Robo-Tale by G.P. Rice & A. Langford; and "A Danger to the Skies" (uncredited), plus reprints and features. £2.25, 128 pages.

Funny things, British comic annuals. A weekly issue of 2000AD has about 25 pages of new strips, for 18 pence; this annual has 44 pages for £2.25, so each page of new strip costs seven times as much.

Granted, the production values are much higher, with glossy board covers and good quality paper, instead of the cheapest grade of newsprint -- but most annuals do not use the top artists, but instead use second-string work, by artists who are either less capable or who are fairly new to comics, and thus unable to command the top rates for their work.

Luckily, 2000AD keeps this cost-saving exercise to the minimum; Kevin O'Neill is here, and Ian Gibson (under both his main pen-names, Emberton and Q. Twerk), and Robin Smith, the comic's art editor, has contributed some nice work too, while the cover, three pictures in one, is by Brian Bolland.

There are 38 pages of reprints from the early issues, too; Judge Dredd, by Malcolm Shaw & Mike McMahon (from Prog 6), MACH One, by Nick Allen & John Cooper (Prog 5), Invasion, by Gerry Finley-Day & Ian Kennedy (Prog 6), and Harlem Heroes, by Tom Tully and Dave Gibbons, who fill 24 pages with the first five episodes of the story of their Aeroball adventures, from Progs 1 to 5. All the reprints are complete, but, as the annual pages are book shape and thus rather narrower than the original comic, they're now very slightly smaller and stretched vertically, by the relatively cunning addition of a little space between the lines of panels, plus a little extra art. And of course, with Harlem Heroes, the repetitive title logo every 4 or 5 pages has been taken out.

Leaving aside covers, that leaves 44 pages, which is devoted to text features, text fiction, a quiz or two, and that sort of thing--and quite an assortment it is. The text "Future Shock" rambles on rather about a shady property developer who sells Earth when he's never even been there, but "The Gung-Ho Run", an Ace Trucking Co text tale, is at least written by regular co-writer Alan Grant and illustrated, under heavy blue overlays, by Massimo Belardinelli. It's quite entertaining--I particularly liked the way that a Cut-out Beam, said to stop all the spaceship's engines, brought the vessel to a sudden, shuddering halt. Hmm -- maybe it engaged the ship's disc brakes?

There's a six-page feature on how space colonies will be constructed, which is all very educational and provides a sop for the parents who'll buy most of the copies of this annual for their children --some inferior annuals fill half their pages with this sort of cheap filler, so we must be grateful that there's no more of this material here. Instead, we get background data on the various 2000AD heroes, from plans of Rogue Trooper's equipment to details of the development of such series as Ace Trucking Co and Nemesis. There are details of the first two Robo-Hunter adventures, complete with illustrations of some of the weirder robots encountered, and there's a mock-up of a special interest magazine, "In The Doghouse (incorporating Practical Bounty Hunting)", which Strontium Dogs subscribe to, with a profile of Johnny Alpha (who is the star of the Strontium Dog strip).

The features stand up fairly well, and make this a book that the 2000AD reader will read and refer to more than once. The passage of five years hasn't hurt the reprints, either, though they show how 2000AD's spirit has changed since then. With art by Dave Gibbons, Mike McMahon, Ian Kennedy, and John Cooper, they fully deserve this new exposure.

However, it's the new strip material that's the most important part of this compilation -- and it is good. The 8-page full-colour Dredd strip by Ian "Emberton" Gibson is very striking, and actually fits in with current continuity, but the 6-page Nemesis strip is for me the best bit of the book, with Kevin O'Neill's finely detailed artwork meshing nicely with Pat Mills' strange, semi-documentary style of script, which reveals that the Blitzspear, Nemesis' spacecraft, is not just a mere machine. The 6-page full-colour Strontium Dog strip casts its hero and his sidekick rather as the strangers who ride into the Wild West town ruled by fear, and clean it up, but it's a strong myth and can stand it.

The Ro-Busters 6-pager is cunningly scripted by Alan Moore, who links that strip with "ABC Warriors"; Bryan Talbot's art isn't as good as his work on Luther Arkwright (currently running in Pssst!), but he does a serviceable job. The untitled Rogue Trooper episode is nicely inventive, too; "Silicon Soul" is rather sombre, but that's more than balanced by the flippancy of "A Danger To The Skies", and Q. Twerk's cute work on the 6-page "Leave it to, um...Burt", where only the Mighty One's thrill-power and general zarjazness can undo the results of office droid Burt's well-meaning blunders. That Tharg's robotic assistants are all based on 2000AD editorial staff & contributors, both in looks and personality (if rather heavily caricatured), merely adds some extra piquancy for those in the know.

Generally, a good introduction to the worlds of 2000AD; I imagine that the New York "Forbidden Planet" shop, among other places, will have copies, if you want to investigate. -Ruan Lanihorne

THE MARVEL COMICS ART OF WALLY WOOD
$7.95 for 64 pages; Thumbtack Books Inc, 657, Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11215, U.S.A.

Collected here into a full-colour album are four fantasy short strips from 1970 issues of Marvel's short-lived TOWER OF SHADOWS mystery comic, and 30 pages of Doctor Doom from ASTONISHING TALES in the same year.

"Flight Into Fear" (Tower of Shadows #5) is a pleasant fantasy about a young man on crutches who climbs onto a stone gargoyle and is transported to a strange medieval dimension, where he has the appropriate adventure. "The Ghost-Beast" (#6) is set in the days before the start of recorded history, and stars Beowulf, who although he saves the girl tied to the tree from the monster, isn't quite as chivalrous as heroes should be, and so is in line for a nasty twist at the end of the tale. "Sanctuary" (#8) stars warrior-king Hamand, who incurs a nasty curse by indulging in grave-robbing; and "Of Swords and Sorcery" (#7), my favourite of the four, has a mercenary, an elf, a pygmy lizard who once was a dwarf but made the mistake of laughing at a wizard, and the standard Wood princess against a flying enchanter whose gaze turns living people to stone. Things look pretty black, until only one of the good guys remains.

"Unto You is Born...The Doomsman" came originally from ASTONISHING TALES #1, dated August 1970, the double-feature comic that also launched Ka-Zar into his own series. It runs 10 pages. "Revolution" in #2, and "Doom Must Die" in #3, also run 10 pages each; however, for this book the splash page of the middle episode has been left out, and page two of the story from the next issue has been tagged on to the end, all but the final panel, to give a more definite finish to the story. Oh, and most of that next issue's splash page is used as the title page of this book.

One could be forgiven for expecting to find <u>all</u> Wally Wood's Marvel Comics art in this book, so this cavalier treatment of episode four is a little strange; the omission of episode two's splash page is bad enough. It would have ended the book on a cliff-hanger that could only be resolved in "The Marvel Comics Art of George Tuska", a book with more pages, I think, than buyers, but it would have helped this book to approach living up to its title. I suppose Wood's inking work, such as Kull #1, Avengers 20-22, Strange Tales #134, Captain America #127, The Cat #1, and Tales of Suspense #71, can just be covered in the introduction, along with the general appreciation of Wood and his work...er, hold on a moment, there isn't any introduction, or checklist -- nothing to tell you whether Wood's alive or dead.

And Wood's major Marvel work, Daredevil #5 to #11? More important than a Dr Doom series some people say was "ghosted" by Larry Hama, I'd have thought...

This album is not the book it could have been; it's not cheap, either. -John Hay

LOVE & ROCKETS #1 (Fall, 1982)
by Gilbert & Jaime Hernandez. 68 pages for $2.95 + $1.00 postage & handling from Fantagraphics Books, 196 West Haviland Lane, Stamford, CT 06903.

So the editors of The Comics Journal saw Gilbert & Jaime Hernandez's 32-page self-published fanzine, and fell in love with their freshness, imagination, and originality. Instead of muttering "wow", shaking their collective heads in awe, and returning to work on the next issue of TCJ, they decided to nurture these new talents, and have now published this TCJ-format expanded edition so that a wider audience can enjoy the work of the two brothers Hernandez.

Gary Groth is to be commended on this, particularly since "The Flames of Gyro" by Jay Disbrow, the previous Fantagraphics comic from three years ago, didn't set the country on fire, exactly. One is very tempted to give this book a positive review for this alone.

However, when you add the facts that the main story is entitled "Bem" ("if you have any information on the whereabouts of Bem, keep it to yourself if you know what's good for you..."), and that the whole thing's pretty neat...well, I can resist everything except temptation.

"Bem" by 'Bert fills 40 pages, with various people plotting to make use of the monster's destructive powers; it all very nearly makes sense, but, and this was 'Bert's intention, follows the logic of a hallucination, so that the ground shifts subtly beneath your feet. 'Bert also contributed "Music for Monsters", a 6-page adventure that fits in a grand total of 105 panels without crowding.

Jaime only has 18 pages of work here, though the front cover "line-up" of five assorted girls is his work too; it reminds me in some ways of Eddie Campbell's work, and the book would be much the poorer without it. There's more humanity here, especially in my favourite stories, the 8-page "Mechan-X" and the 4-page "Locas Tambien"; real people are on the page.

There is nudity, so I wouldn't commend this book to your maiden aunt or even her 10-year-old nephew; but what is an underground or alternative comic without a few idealised breasts? It's a cliché to compare such a magazine favourably to Heavy Metal -- but then, I could never resist clichés, either... -Christine Padgett

THE FIRST KINGDOM #16
"The Creation of the Merets" by Jack Katz; $1.50, Bud Plant Inc.

Two-thirds of the way there.

Jack Katz first came into the comics field at the start of the fifties, and was part of the Harry "A" Chesler shop, doing mystery art for Ned Pines' comics in 1952 & 1953 before moving over to the comic group that had been Timely, would become Marvel, and was then Atlas. In 1956 he left comics for fifteen years, urged back by the seed of this graphic novel growing within him.

In 1971 and 1972, he returned, doing a little mystery work for DC, the lead strip in the three-issue run of Skywald's four-colour entry, JUNGLE ADVENTURES (a lord of the jungle called Zangar), and a story in CREEPY #45 for Warren, "Targos", which was planned as the start of a series with a similar scope to First Kingdom, but never went any further.

I was puzzled by a reference to Jack Katz as a "Marvel artist" somewhere, but a little research revealed that he used the name "Jay Hawk", and was co-penciller with Marie Severin of SUB-MARINER #17 (which includes a high priest who was a precursor in many ways of the villainous Nadan), as well as pencilling a mystery short story or two, including "Desert Scream", inked by Barry Smith, in MONSTERS ON THE PROWL #9.

After trying all the main publishers of comics, he reached the conclusion that the only way to do the sort of epic he wanted to create was to cut loose and, at the age of 47, abandon all the security he and his wife Carolyn had achieved, and sit down and start drawing...

It's an awesome project that Jack Katz embarked on almost ten years ago--a 768-page graphic novel, to be published in twentyfour twice-yearly 32-page instalments. The first issue appeared in the autumn of 1974...and now the sixteenth episode has been published.

Already, it's a massive achievement, and I recommend it to anyone whose interest in comics goes beyond Marvel and DC's superheroes. Jack has a distinctive style of drawing, and, creating his own world, he has free rein here. He has ignored comics convention by eliminating the gaps between panels, and replacing the word balloons by type-set blocks of text at the top of the picture; in the first issues, where he had anything up to 15 panels on a page, panel progression could be a problem, but, after swinging too far in the other direction, so that Book 11 had 32 full-page illustrations and was more like a colouring book than a comic, with around 3 panels per page now he's striking a happy medium, and the art and story-telling fit together well.

The art is often stately and carefully posed, but manages to be expressive, and also visionary. Katz men are slender and tall, though well-muscled, with straight long hair if they're heroes, crew-cuts if they're villains, or no hair at all if they're wise men, priests, oracles, or "gods". The women are half a head shorter, and even the unscrupulous ones have long, normally blonde, straight hair. Like many artists, Jack prefers to draw bodies and muscles rather than clothes and creases, so each hero, heroine, ally, villain, or "god" is allocated about 5 square inches of cloth. Bare breasts are the norm here, which may help sales in "underground" outlets, but there's nothing rude in the way that Jack interprets the human figure --he draws them as he sees them. Panels are crowded with characters, and backgrounds are filled in with meticulous detail, whether it's the control room of a vast spaceship or the stately, rolling landscapes of Jack's world -- it all fits together, bringing Jack's grand vision alive for the reader.

However, while I have great admiration for what Jack Katz has done, and is doing, I do have reservations.

First of all, there's the scale of the piece, which works against the method of publishing it. While other alternative series like CEREBUS and ELFQUEST do break down into individual comics, no 32-page issue of FIRST KINGDOM is more than a chapter of the whole novel. The canvas is too vast. Tundran is the hero, and he's featured on 3 pages at the start of this chapter, and 4 at the end. Over half the issue's in flashback, and we also have to drop in briefly on the voyaging priests who trained Tundran as an infant, on the evil ruler-to-be of a rival nation, on the "gods" of Hellese Voran, on the small band of human survivors from the spaceship that brought the "gods" originally, on one particular "god" making a decision he'd been agonising over for quite a few issues, on Tundran's wicked uncle who has usurped his throne, and on two assassins who've been sent by the wicked uncle with instructions to eliminate Tundran. And this still leaves some characters unseen in this issue!

The problem is the flashbacks; it is pleasant to know where the Merets, tiny winged people, came from, and to find out more about how the super-intelligent H-11 androids from the original spaceship set about giving the post-atomic war Earth a set of "gods", but having ten pages given over to a minor character's recollections of an unimportant skirmish in a war that ended years before the spaceship landed strikes me as a waste of those ten pages.

The flashbacks are science fiction of a galaxy-spanning kind -- they clash with the epic fantasy that Tundran is the hero of, which is a completely different type of story despite the "after the bomb" rationale. Tundran will, presumably, not only regain his kingdom but, via either the "gods" or that group of human survivors, confront the galaxy, or else this sf emphasis is leading us nowhere... but can there be a convincing melding of the two? It's as if "Clash of the Titans", "Alien", and "The Ten Commandments" were cut together as one movie -- and shown on television as weekly 15-minute episodes!

Jack Katz still has eight more chapters in which to convince me that all the elements he's using can come together. I hope he does, because that will be a most considerable triumph. But even if in some way he fails, that will hardly detract from his achievement so far, the creation of a graphic epic and one man's statement about life, the universe, and everything. Even a flawed masterpiece is to be welcomed, and has much to show us. It's a bold, fresh gamble, showing what can be done with the comics medium. Try it.

-John Hay

JUDGE DREDD ANNUAL 1983
Judge Dredd in "The Big Itch", "Behold the Beast", and "It's Happening on Line 9" by T.B. Grover and Carlos Ezquerra; plus "Max Normal" by Alan Grant & José Casanovas, and "The Mean Machine Gets Married" by Alan Grant & Robin Smith. 96 pages, £2.75

As the most popular character in 2000AD, Judge Dredd has his own annual. It has less pages, and costs more, but it does have twice as many colour pages. These are devoted to new full-colour stories of Dredd, drawn this year by Carlos Ezquerra, who's been the most active Dredd artist for the past year, replacing Mike McMahon, who did similar service on the previous two annuals.

"The Big Itch" starts the book off. It is only six pages long (the colour page section is in theory 8 pages long, but one page is devoted to the contents list, and the eighth is glued to the board of the cover!), and chronicles the arrival in Mega-City One of a newly-mutated super-flea that resists all attempts to control it. By page 4, people are climbing into garbage grinders to escape the infernal itching, and everyone is scratching like mad. Except for one, that is:

"How come you ain't--AHH--got the fleas, Judge Dredd?"

"I've got them. I'm just not scratching."

Luckily, something is found that the fleas can't stand the smell of, and they retreat to the radiation-pit that spawned them, at which point a nuclear device is detonated on top of them. End of menace.

"Behold the Beast" takes up a full 16-page colour section in the middle, and has Dredd abducted to an alien dimension to face "The Supreme Court of the Dead"; only his intestinal fortitude saves Earth from invasion. It's well done, and gives a chance for some of Dredd's most formidable foes to make brief reappearances.

"It's Happening on Line 9" runs for the final 7 pages (well, the back cover has to be glued to something too...), and concerns a tv phone-in programme where one of the phone-inners is a sniper on a killing spree. It's a biting satire on phone-in shows, and people's attitudes to them, and closes the book on a high note.

"Max Normal" stars in a 6-page black & white story with lots of wash effects; he's Dredd's top informer, and the most outrageous dresser in the Mega-City, as he always wears a three-piece pinstripe suit, plus carnation, bowler hat, and so on, looking like a 1950s English "city gent". Following the recent nuclear war, his neighbourhood has gone to seed, and Max is the only inhabitant remaining; he manages to cope, and even tips off Dredd about a group of marauders.

"The Mean Machine Gets Married" doesn't feature Dredd; Mean Machine was one of the Angel Gang, with a dial on his forehead that governed just how mean he could get, and, with his relatives, was killed by Dredd some while ago, so this story is a flash-back; it's also played mainly for laughs, with Mean's bride proving tougher than he is.

There are 41 pages of new strips, and also two Judge Dredd reprints from the early days of 2000AD: from Prog 20, the 4-page episode introducing Max Normal as Dredd wipes out one of the most serious rackets, a comic ring (dealing in 20th century 2000ADs -- habit forming!), and from Prog 32 a 5-page story of a robotic hotel that goes out of control. Both have art by Mike McMahon, with scripting by T.B. Grover and R. Flynn respectively.

The 44 pages of features include the requisite quizzes, a campaign map of the "Block Mania" story, an interview by Burt of T.B. Grover, a text story, "A Day In The Death of Citizen Egg" by Alan Grant, illustrated by Dave Gibbons, a case-book of a typical judge's day's work. "I Was A Teenage Perp" by Alan Grant again, with art by Brett Ewins, readers' art, data files on various villains, "In Memorium: Judge Giant", and other such goodies.

It all can be found behind another very fine Brian Bolland front cover, and if your usual dealer doesn't have copies, again your best bet would probably be the New York branch of Forbidden Planet. It's a bit expensive if you've never encountered Mega-City One's toughest law officer before; better to try the 2000AD Annual, which has more variety, including Judge Dredd. They're both useful additions to any fan's bookshelf. -Ruan Lanihorne

WEIRD WAR TALES #116 (October)
The Creature Commandos in "Doorway to Hell" by Robert Kanigher & Fred Carrillo; G.I. Robot in "The Lonely Robot" by Robert Kanigher, Carmine Infantino & Sal Trapini

How can I be tactful about this? I can say that the 8-page back-up is okay, if a little--er--mechanical; I can even say that Gil Kane's initial sketch for the cover was pretty good, though they ought to have had it properly pencilled and inked. As it is, it looks as if Kane is selling quick fibre-tip sketches as if they were full art; he's a genius, and he can get away with it, but it's not to be encouraged, or else they'll all be at it.

It's the 15-page main story that makes this a comic worth commenting on. It is just so unbelievably bad!

I've nothing against Fred Carrillo's art; while he wouldn't be my choice for a war comic, he does a competent job, in places reminiscent of Jack Kirby, though of his weaknesses rather than strengths. And I wouldn't expect him to be particularly inspired by the script.

Now, Robert Kanigher's written a lot of war scripts. I can read his Sergeant Rock and Haunted Tank work with enjoyment, but he must have fallen asleep at his typewriter half an hour before he began this particular tale.

It's got feathers, an aversion to cranberry sauce, and feels distinctly uneasy when Thanksgiving approaches -- is that tactful enough? Hack sentimentality, dumb captions, jerky transitions, a totally silly mixed-up plot grating a goddess of fire against the inevitable nazis...this got past <u>two</u> editors, messrs Schwartz and Bridwell? I know Julie Schwartz tends to think of comics as normally only read on the sanitized-for-your-convenience, but that would be a hazardous operation, as the only way to get very far into this horrendous mish-mash of a story is to start laughing at it.

I've followed WWT right from its start eleven years ago; it's had its ups and downs, but it has published some excellent material over the years. It's a shame to see it reduced to two uninspiring series, and it's doubly a shame to see so tiny a quantity of respect lavished on it.

In case you hadn't gathered, due to me being so tactful and all, this wasn't my favourite comic of the month. -John Hay

WARLORD SUMMER SPECIAL
36 9" x 12" pages for 36 pence

Britain too has her Warlord, star of a weekly comic of the same name that's been going for eight years now -- in fact, the existence of this comic has kept Travis Morgan's monthly adventures from being distributed in the British Isles beside the rest of the DC line, as having two comics of the same name would apparently confuse the distribution system no end.

And Warlord has his summer special, in effect a de luxe version of the weekly comic. The pages are larger, the paper slick instead of cheap newsprint, and half the pages are in full colour.

There are seven stories here, of three or four pages each -- two in full colour, and five in black & white, although two of these do have one or two full-colour panels on their opening pages. Arranging these must have been tricky, as the type of printing machinery that D.C. Thomson use for this sort of special will print in colour on only one side of the paper, only managing black & white on the other side, so to keep the same strip going without changing from colour to black & white and back needs some careful juggling work. Normally this means slipping in a page of martial photographs every now and again--either black & white world war II ones, or colour ones of Britain's modern tanks, planes, and warships.

I don't buy the weekly WARLORD; I tried it a couple of years ago, but found it too xenophobic by far, with the sub-human nasty nips being despatched (a bag full of poisonous snakes being tied over one's head, for example) with great relish by stranded schoolboys, and the kill-crazy krauts being mown down with glee. This seems to have been toned down here, I'm

glad to say -- though it's still nowhere near the standard of DC's Sergeant Rock, or IPC's companion magazine to 2000AD, BATTLE.

The first story features "Britain's top secret agent" of World War II, Lord Peter Flint, code-named Warlord. Since we have only 4 pages, we're asked to take it on trust that he's somehow become one of the pilots on a German aircraft carrier that is skulking in a Norwegian fiord. After sabotaging a sneak raid on a British convoy by breaking radio silence, he sets a few bombs on the carrier, and takes off just in time. The only redeeming feature is that he does take his harmless non-nazi observer, Willi, to safety with him. "For you the war is over, as they say", Flint remarks with a final grin.

"Raider", in three pages, is perhaps the least likable story, and the least likely to add to international friendship and understanding, with a German pocket battleship disguised as a cruise liner in the Pacific, blowing up unarmed merchantmen and machine-gunning all survivors. Eventually, though, the game is given away by a swastika scrawled in blood by a dying sailor low on its bows...

Commando "Roughneck Rogers" provides the cover scene, the highlight from his 4-page adventure, as he and his sergeant ride an experimental German buzz-bomb on floats out to sea, having been left behind after a raid on a V1 launching site, only to find another of those handy pocket battleships straight ahead. "The Cowards" has the crew of an Albemarle glider tug, wrongly accused of cowardice when the cable to the glider full of soldiers gets released ahead of schedule -- they are able to redeem themselves on their next mission, however. "Kamfgruppe Falken" has German heroes, down-to-earth men of a penal battalion heckled by some fairly useless S.S. men before they finally prove their worth; as is customary, they are fighting on the Russian front, so that it isn't British soldiers that they decimate.

The two colour strips are both nicely done, in glowing painted colours. "Union Jack Jackson" (honest! Would I make up a name like that?) is a Royal Marine temporarily attached to the U.S. Marine Corps. His American buddies seem nice enough, though they rely on U.J.J. to get them out of scrapes, work out what's really going on, and do the dangerous stuff; the art is by Ian Kennedy, who has also done work for IPC's STARLORD and the British Marvel BLAKE'S 7 monthly, and very nice it is too. "Cassidy", the other colour strip, is set in the early days of the Korean War, and features an American carrier strike jet squadron's battle to defend the carrier U.S.S. Valley Forge from a motor torpedo boat attack...after they run out of ammunition!

This comic would seem strange to someone who only reads American comics, even if his reading includes G.I. COMBAT, which is I suppose the nearest equivalent. The publishers, D.C. Thomson, are a British tradition, with comics generally cheaper than IPC's titles, and in many ways their output is less sophisticated, both in the humour comics and the adventure ones. They pay less than IPC for both scripts and art, and, to my mind, it shows...a string of clichés from old war movies and older comics does not a good story make. Rather, it tends to reinforce old prejudices, and keeps alive this unhealthy fascination with a war that most people think ended more than a third of a century ago. As it is, this is an interesting read, just for a change--but it doesn't tempt me to add WARLORD to my regular weekly reading.

-Ruan Lanihorne

THE DOCTOR WHO ANNUAL 1983
World Distributors; 64 pages, £2.50

Despite the clumsy photo-cover of Peter Davison doing his Village Idiot impersonation, this is a good buy. The writers and artists have obviously made some attempt to reflect the mood of the latest series, and anyone who's read a TV-based annual over the past ten years will know how rare this is. The six-page colour strip is no great shakes, but it does have a coherent storyline, and it is easy to follow. Adric looks about eight years old (which should please his legion of fans).

There are some short behind-the-scenes articles illustrated by colour photos of Castrovalva and the Zero Room, and the usual selection of short stories. "Flight to Nowhere" is interesting because of its resemblance to the "Time-Flight" serial. Dare I say it, "Flight to Nowhere" is the better of the two.

"The Armageddon Chrysalis" is a marvellous yarn about the Tardis getting stuck inside a noxious giant slug. Anyone who enjoyed those Giant Whale episodes of "Voyage to The Bottom of The Sea" will love the descriptions of the Doctor hauling himself up through the creature's gut, and the illustration of the Doctor being crushed by a giant muscle is, for my money, the best in the book.

-Graeme Bassett

THE SAGA OF SWAMP THING #7 (November)
"I Have Seen the Splintered Timbers of a Hundred Shattered Hulls" by Martin Pasko and Tom Yeates; plus The Phantom Stranger in "The Haunting of Amanda Dove" by Mike W. Barr and Fred Carrillo

Swamp Thing's saga began in 1971, in the July issue (#92) of House of Secrets, within months of the black & white debuts of Marvel's Man-Thing (in Savage Tales #1) and Skywald's Heap (in Psycho #2). In this first appearance, by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, Swamp Thing resembled the Heap, only grafted into a gothic-style mystery story and handled with infinitely better taste.

Response was heavy, and positive; the first issue of Swamp Thing's own comic, by the same creative team (including the editor, Joe Orlando) appeared only sixteen months later--a mere fortnight after Man-Thing's four-colour debut in Fear #10, and a year after Skywald tried out the Heap in a one-shot colour comic.

Berni Wrightson stayed around for ten bi-monthly issues, and Len Wein stayed for thirteen; their successors, Nestor Redondo and David Michelinie, were wisely chosen, and the series continued in high style, with even Gerry Conway contributing a good script for the story in issues 19 and 20, which had originally been planned as a 25-page story for a giant issue.

The last good issue was #22, however; David Michelinie departed to script the short-running Starfire title, and Gerry Conway was back, this time not constrained by fill-in status, and #23 boasted a new direction, with a superhero type on the front cover, and ol' Swampy changing back into human form before our very eyes. Dr Alec Holland, as our non-mossy hero was now, lasted one more issue, plotted by Conway, scripted by David Anthony Kraft, and drawn by Ernie Chan & Fred Carrillo --the only moments of drama were when a character would visualize how Swamp Thing would have handled the situation. Issue 25 would have featured Swamp Thing versus Hawkman, in Portland, Oregon; it never appeared. Some people wish the same could be said for the previous two issues.

Swamp Thing had already appeared in Brave & Bold #122, repaying the Batman's guest appearance in issue 7; after his eviction from his own book, he was next to surface in Challengers of the Unknown #82, the second issue of that title's brief 1977/1978 revival. He was billed as a "guest star", but he only appeared in flashback in what was a sequel to issue 8 -- though one panel was inked by Berni Wrightson, which adds to the interest.

However, Swampy <u>did</u> appear in the story in Challs #83; we learnt that the "cure" in issue 23 hadn't been permanent, and was breaking down. Dr Holland had to choose between continuing frantic efforts to stop going all mossy again, and helping the Challengers save the world from his old foe M'Nagala...and, at the end of this story, the world was safe, and he was, once again, a Swamp Thing.

He became an unofficial member of the Challengers for the remaining four issues of their run, as did Deadman; the scripter was Gerry Conway, obviously having second thoughts about what he'd done to Swampy in his own book, and trying to put things right. Swamp Thing next surfaced in D.C. Comics Presents #8, in an interesting problem of ethics posed by Steve Englehart, followed by Brave & Bold #176 in July 1981, written by Martin Pasko, who, on the letters page, Paul Levitz called "our personal pick for a Swamp-writer if the series ever gets revived."

And that brings us to the revival of the series, by Martin Pasko (Paul Levitz is not to be ignored, obviously, when he voices a preference!) and Kubert School alumnus Tom Yeates.

Editor Len Wein, or his assistant Carl Gafford, with a beguiling blend of ignorance and arrogance, says in issue six's letters page "as far as we're concerned, the stories published after issue #21 never happened...the rabidly continuity-minded among our readers may consign those stories to "Another Earth" or to the trash-heap--it's their choice." Tampering with Earth-1's history like that is not only foolish, it's quite unnecessary, due to the Challengers of the Unknown storyline. But, in itself, the new series is being well handled.

A "saga" it is, a continuing story not unlike The Night Force, with characters not wholly good or bad; the "alien sea-monster" idea in #7 is weird, but the subplots are enough to carry the book. Tom Yeates wouldn't be my choice for the book, but Berni and Nestor are tough acts to follow. It's a good series once again--a series well worth collecting. -John Hay

THE NEW TEEN TITANS ANNUAL #1 (1982)
"Final Conflict" by Marv Wolfman, George Perez & Romeo Tanghal

It begins in joy, as Starfire soars high over the Grand Canyon at the start of the fourth issue of Tales of The NewTTs, and it ends with an embrace, 135 pages later on the last page of this annual...but in between, things get a little weird.

That final issue of the "Tales" mini-series had Starfire, Koriand'r, telling her Titan comrades the story of her life before her rather abrupt appearance on Earth in NewTTs #1. Her life, and also the life of her elder sister Komand'r, who had hated her from the day she'd been born. Their planet, Tamaran, was an ideal world, a paradise, but subject to raids by warships from the Citadel, the planet closest to their sun, so both sisters had to be sent to the Warlords of Okaara to be taught the sciences of war. They were pitted against each other in a graduation tourney, but Komand'r fought viciously, to kill, and was banished. She went to the Citadel, and gave them all Tamaran's secrets, so that when next they raided, the planet Tamaran was devastated. Unless a sacrifice from Tamaran's royal family was given, the planet would be completely obliterated. Koriand'r was the sacrifice the Citadel demanded, because that was the reward Komand'r wanted for her treason to her world, to see Princess Koriand'r a slave...a special slave. They shared an ordeal which gave them both the starbolt powers, and finally Koriand'r escaped, chased by the slavers, reaching Earth in time for New Teen Titans #1.

Now that story came as a shock to me. Some of the other histories had their grimmer moments, true, but the Starfire story had pain, humiliation, torture and bondage by the year.

And then came New Teen Titans #23, and Kory gets recaptured, and is soon under heavy restraint, legs secured together, arms held tightly behind her, forced into a half-crouch, while Komand'r claws at her face until the blood flows.

She spends most of issues 24 and 25 tied up, too, as the rest of the Titans join forces with the Omega Men to rush to her rescue, but, thankfully, by the time this annual begins she has been released from her bonds, and is able to move about a bit.

The annual's a battle between the Titans their allies and the Warlords, punctuated by a flashback that tells us the origins of X'Hal, the Living Goddess, and the whole serial climaxes with a hand-to-hand battle between Koriand'r and Komand'r to decide the fate of the entire star system.

There's no point in going into the plot in detail, let me just say that Marv has not lost his magic, and the dynamics of the group are as ever nicely balanced, while the art is vintage Perez, even if Changeling, allegedly 16 going on 17, is still portrayed as a darling little 12-year-old. Are they trying to out-cute the X-Men's Kitty Pride?

The New Teen Titans is one of the best comics around, with the stability to take off into greatness. It deserves all the success it has had...Marv Wolfman is one of the most skilful comics writers, and he's teamed with two top-notch artists.

It's a good 135-page outer-space epic,

basically, and I just hope that people whose newsstands get the monthly issues but don't bother with effete indulgences like annuals can get hold of the last 39 pages of the story. However, as I said earlier, there are elements to the story that could be taken as unpleasant.

Now Starfire, or Koriand'r, must be the main viewpoint character in the group for most female readers. The very first issue started with her, and centred around her arrival on Earth. Raven's too spooky to, if you'll excuse the expression, empathize with, and Wonder Girl can't project bolts of force, hasn't as neat a hairstyle, and most importantly can't fly.

So there one is, happily involved with one's Earth-One buddies, avoiding Garfield "Zirk" Logan's suggestive remarks, and keeping an eye on Robin, having recently decided that The Titans are even more fun than Archie, Betty, & Veronica, and then before you know what's happened you are abducted by a wicked elder sister, kept in bondage, tortured by her and by more than a few merciless aliens, your face scratched and blood trickling from the corner of your mouth.

It's enough to put one off metal-plated bikinis for months...

I don't know, maybe I'm being too sensitive on behalf of people who don't need any protection, but I don't care to see women in bondage, particularly in idealized shiny metal bonds. I don't like to see innocent teenage girls tortured. And most of all. I'm not exactly ecstatic to find all this in a popular Code-approved superhero comic aimed at people from ten years upwards. I haven't reacted like this since an issue of ROOK had a female character spitted & roasted over an open fire, and that wasn't in a Code-approved comic, but in a black & white magazine.

But, reservations aside, this was the climax of one of the best outer-space comics epics I've read, and shows what a good comics team can do when they try. With this and the LSH, DC are unbeatable at present. -Christine Padgett

WARRIOR #5 (September)
Marvelman: "Dragons" by Alan Moore & Garry Leach; V for Vendetta: "Versions" and "Vertigo" by Moore & David Lloyd; Shandor, Demon Stalker: "The Empire of Sin" by Steve Moore & David Jackson; The Madman: "The Chrono-Cycle Mk I" by Paul Neary & Mick Austin; The Spiral Path: "The Drowning Woman" by Steve Parkhouse; Laser Eraser & Pressbutton: "Wanted" by Pedro Henry & Steve Dillon.

From 1954 to 1963, Marvelman had his own weekly, and finally monthly, comic; it ran for 346 issues, taking over where a reprint Captain Marvel comic left off. And now he's back.

No trashy "suspendium" gimmick here--Marvelman, plus his two junior aides Kid Marvelman and Young Marvelman, got caught in an explosion so powerful that Young Marvelman was killed, and Marvelman was hurt so bad that he lost all memory of his "magic word", and lived an ordinary life -- except for the nightmares.

But now he's back; a little rusty and unsure, but almost as powerful as ever. For twenty years, though, Kid Marvelman has been the only person with the power, and his skills have grown as his mind has been corrupted. You drop his coffee, and he'll kill you; in fact, he will rather enjoy it. He wants to kill Marvelman's wife; I reckon he will.

It's gripping--Captain Marvel has never got anywhere near this, and Garry Leach's art melds power and drama with detail and realism in a way you must see to believe. You understand why he can only draw six pages per month.

Most strips here are only 5 or 6 pages long, in fact, which makes a month to wait between episodes a little wearing; here only the Laser Eraser & Pressbutton story is longer, at 8 pages, which gives more room to move.

Axel Pressbutton is a cyborg; once he was a florist, but the 24% of him left is connected into a killing machine, with his left arm ending in a meat cleaver, and now he's the companion of the "laser eraser" (licensed assassin) Mysta Mystralis. Together, they're in big trouble, hunted by a variety of people, one of whom, Donthax, is accompanied by Zirk, who resembles a dumpy little pig without a head or tail, or even eyes, but manages to be a sadistic little sex maniac.

All clear? It's all handled lightly but nicely, with the reactions of a girl on Donthax's ship as Zirk approaches drawn cinematically by Steve Dillon. I'd call them apprehension, distaste, surprise, interest, and ecstacy--and it's probably just as well that Zirk himself is "off camera". The cut to Mysta polishing the cyborg's shoulder is weird...

Marvelman is today, Eraser/Pressbutton is set in the far future; "V for Vendetta" takes place in 1997, in a bleak, fascist, post-war Britain. We get two episodes in this issue, to celebrate the magazine's photo-cover showing the main character, V, in silhouette in a London nightscape

photographed by editor Dez Skinn himself. "Versions" takes us into the mind of the Leader of the government, and then shows V holding a conversation with the statue of Justice over London's Old Bailey law courts, before blowing it up. "Vertigo" takes place on the fifteenth floor of a police state police station, where after questioning suspects are told to "take a walk around the block", and shown out through the window onto a narrow ledge. V saves one victim, and sends his police questioner out -- after leaving a banana-skin in a fatal place.

Vendetta's art is stylized, with heavy blacks, regular panels, and a line that's thick yet sensitive; it blends with the script to give a solid reality to this nightmare future, our knowledge of which is growing with every chapter. "V" is an anarchist, a killer, a terrorist--is his lonely path the way of the hero?

"Madman" is an uneasy tale of alternate dimensions; we only get a 2-page fragment this time.

"The Drowning Woman" is not part of the main narrative of the Spiral Path, both written and drawn by Steve Parkhouse. It has the inevitability of myth here, with a hero warned four times to "Beware the drowning woman" who still plunges right in like an idiot, only to be redeemed by his companion's tears. Not exactly a hero to identify with, but most painstakingly done and well worth reading.

The story of Father Shandor was begun by John Bolton, but David Jackson's work here is no let-down. This strip may well have a limited life; the story here takes place in hell, involving the voluptuous Jaramsheela and her brother, Angorfarax, a demon. Shandor only appears in flash-back, and as a severed head, or so it seems...

In Britain, Warrior has national distribution, albeit not very efficiently done as yet, at 50p; in America, it's sent to specialist shops by Bud Plant Inc, Capital City Distribution, Diamond Comic Distributors, Glenwood Distributors, Pacific Comics, and Sea Gate Distributors, so you should be able to track down a copy.

Strong scripts, knockout art, lots of editorial personality from Dez Skinn, one of the "founding fathers" of fandom in Britain...this is a magazine with tons of potential, it would be a crime if you let it slip past you. If only Dez could get more pages of Marvelman, and perhaps a slicker grade of interior paper, it would be truly unbeatable. -Ruan Lanihorne

THE REIVERS by John Grant

I would say to every Scot that reads this--buy this book. What is a mere £1.95 in comparison with this unique look at our country's heritage? (And even the rest of you should enjoy it. At least, the intelligent ones should.)

The Simsons of Kilnockie, the most incompetent clan on this side of the Border in the heyday of the Border Raids (for you Sassenachs, that was from Henry VIII to the middle of Elizabeth I), set out to help young Lord Lochinvar win his true love Fair Ellen, with a view to the abduction of as many as possible of Fair Ellen's papa's cattle while they're at it. And on the way, they meet a rich and varied cast, which includes Henry VIII, James V, True Thomas the Rhymer, Kilroy (at least, they don't meet him, but there is evidence he unwisely explored the Bogle's Bronze Pot), Rabbi Burns the Jewish poet, Charles Atlas (via one Sir Hulke the Incredible), Victor Sylvester, Guy Fawkes, and Little Bo-Peep.

I can't speak for the art -- it is well known that I can tell Adams from Kirby, and that's it. It looks fine to me, but I am no expert. But the writing I can speak for -- it's very good. Mr Grant has a fine sense of humour, and is moreover a credit to our country's educational system, enlivening his work with quotations from Keats, Gray, the Agamemnon of Aeschylus, Burns, Wordsworth, some Elizabethan poet I couldn't identify (probably Ben Jonson), and that beautiful traditional Scots song "Three craws sat upon the wa'."

The book can be found at all the major Scottish bookshops--try your local Menzies --and if anyone has trouble, the address of the publisher is James Thin, The Mercat Press, 55 South Bridge, Edinburgh.

-Kathleen Glancy

SHORT SUBJECTS by Keith Williams

SABRE #1 (Eclipse): Regurgitated McGregor philosophising; regurgitated Paul Gulacy Steranko-swipes; inevitable tons of verbiage covering pretty but static pictures; no noticeable emotion outside the words; soft-porn sex scenes. Should go very well.

WOLVERINE #3: A Claremont-Miller production like this was virtually bound to be overdone, and it is; but it was also virtually bound to be gut-gripping, and it is. Violence as an art-form lives, and nobody does it better. Personally, I prefer my fantasies with a slightly lower body-count, but you have to ride out the trends, I guess.

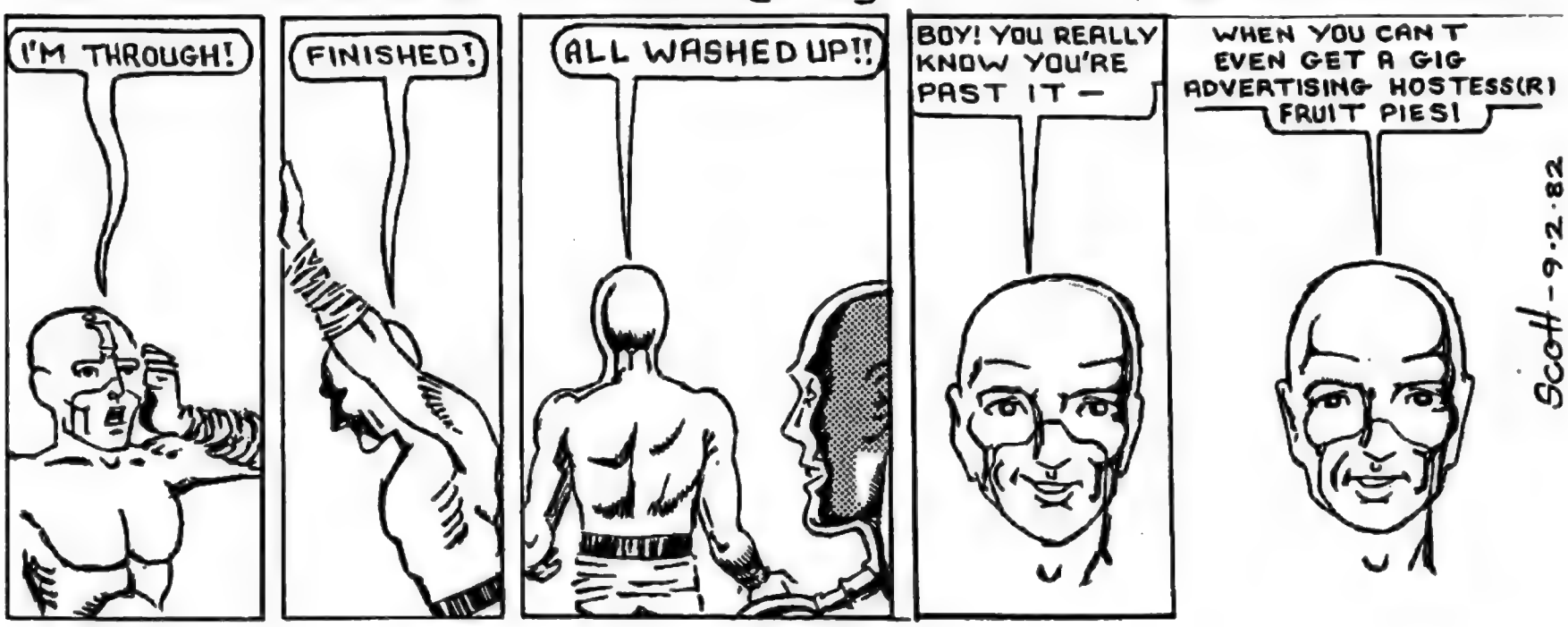
NIGHT FORCE #4: Different. This book is pretty close to unpredictable -- I like that in a mag. There's mystery, whimsy, action, adventure -- and thrills, chills, spills, the lot, you know? And even if quite a bit of the Colan artwork feels rather familiar, it's still reasonably effective. And the colour's rilly triffic (no fooling). Recommended.

MARVEL FANFARE #5: Why, pray tell, do the decidedly unspecial tales that appear in this book get selected for this 'special' treatment? Is the theory that it will make them special? Because if so, I wish to record the fifth successive disproof of the theory. It's not that the stories are unacceptable or anything, in fact if most of them had appeared in the standard titles, I wouldn't have been bothered about them at all -- which is the point. Stories that are going to be singled out for, supposedly, superior presentation should surely get this 'honour' by virtue of being different to, 'better' than, your average story...shouldn't they?

TEAM AMERICA #6: An undemanding, 60s-ish, low-aiming entertainment comic. Well why not? It's a niche that needs to be filled.

It's a shame I couldn't find a #2 of anything that I could review, just to complete the set. I thought of ANNIE #2, but just couldn't face it. -KW

The all-new ab-ventures of The Imago by BJ MARTIN © BJ GRAPHICSZ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FINISHED!
ALL WASHED UP!!
BOY! YOU REALLY KNOW YOU'RE PAST IT —
WHEN YOU CAN'T EVEN GET A GIG ADVERTISING HOSTESS(R) FRUIT PIES!
ScotH - 9.2.82

KATHOLICITY

BY KATHLEEN GLANCY

See Judge Dredd.
See Judge Dredd in his black leather outfit.
With gold metal accessories.
(A Badge and a bit of chain, belt & boots, and a large bird on one shoulder.)
Kinky, kinky, kinky.
What *is* Judge Dredd, exactly?
Wrong--he is exactly a sort of futuristic policeman.

See Judge Dredd on his futuristic motor-bike.
He roars about on it at great speed.
Whoosh, Whoosh, Whoosh.
He dodges in and out of the traffic in the Mega-City on it.
(Which is where he works...when not engaged in interminable treks across Cursed Earths, or searches for lost children.)
He blasts people with its built-in guns.
Sometimes he talks to it.
And it answers.
Do *we* have people like that?
Yes, yes, yes.
They are called "Hell's Angels."
The only difference is, their bikes don't answer when they talk to them.
Also, they are not The Law.

Judge Dredd *is* The Law.
He says so himself.
Being The Law in Mega-City 1 is fun.
Fun, fun, fun.
At least, it's fun for anyone but nasty criminals.
A Judge can shoot nasty criminals out of hand.
Who are the nasty criminals?
The Judge decides that.
See the nasty criminal that Judge Dredd is shooting.
What has the nasty criminal done?
He used a Bad Word in public, perhaps?
Or dropped litter?
No, no, no. Worse than that.
He stuck out his tongue at Judge Dredd.

See Judge Dredd in head-and-shoulders shot.
I forgot to tell you about Judge Dredd's helmet.
Judge Dredd wears a helmet of gold metal.
And he *never* takes it off.
What, never?
No, never.
What, *never*?
Absolutely not.
Chorus (to tune of H.M.S. Pinafore):
He never takes his helmet off
Then--give 3 cheers and do not scoff
At the Judge who never takes his helmet off
Yes give 3 cheers -- best *not* to scoff
Though he never takes his helmet off.
Sorry about that.
I forgot I was writing a primer, not a Gilbert & Sullivan parody.
No, he never takes it off.
God knows why not.
He can't have been born with it.
Can he?
Whatever did he look like as a little baby?
Or back when *he* was a Judge Child?
Come to that, what does he look like *now* when he takes a bath?
Only God knows.
(And perhaps Messrs Bolland and McMahon.)
For information about how he washes his hair, if any, apply to God--or Mr Wagner.

See Judge Hershey.
She was apparently named after a chocolate bar.
Judge Hershey wears a black leather outfit with gold badge, chain, bird, and so on.
But no helmet.
This enables us to notice Judge Hershey is a woman.
Has Judge Dredd noticed Judge Hershey is a woman?
No, no, no.
Judge Dredd is not interested in women.
Only The Law.
The physical appearance of his fellow Judges means nothing to him.
Except for Judge Lopez.
Judge Dredd had noticed *his* physical appearance.
Shame on you for what you were thinking.
It's only that Judge Dredd disapproved strongly of Judge Lopez's moustache.

But is there nobody, then, who cares for Judge Dredd?
Yes, yes, yes.
There is one being who loves Judge Dredd.
Who lives with him.
Looks after his house.
Cooks his meals.
And probably also knows what he looks like in the bath.
Has Judge Dredd a loving wife, then?
No, no, no.
The being in question is Walter.
See Walter.
He is a male robot, or wobot.
Who lisps.
Sometimes one can't help *wondering* about Judge Dredd.

Does nobody else love Judge Dredd?
Yes, yes, yes.
A whole lot of comics fans--
Normally a pretty liberal bunch of people --Adore Judge Dredd, even if he *is* a fascist.
Fascist, Fascist, Fascist.
The more Fascist he gets, the more they like it.
And there was someone else
Who would have loved Judge Dredd.
Remember Dr Frederick Wertham?
If Dr Frederick Wertham had discovered Judge Dredd
He would have written a whole *book* about him.
Which would probably have sold well, at least in Britain.
And got Dr Frederick Wertham a lot of money and publicity.
Which is why Dr Frederick Wertham would really have loved Judge Dredd. -KG

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Fan-Things

I am remarkably ignorant of the fanzine scene in America, being tucked away on the other side of the storm-tossed North Atlantic, and so any attempt to compare the outlook in Britain and the United States is doomed to failure. I'm able to get hold of The Comics Journal, Amazing Heroes, The Comic Reader, and a few of the New Media line, but the <u>real</u> fanzines are less easy to obtain, and the review column in TCR, admirable though it is, gives only a tantalising glimpse of what is going on.

I've got nothing against the slick, high circulation magazines about comics, but you don't need me to tell you about them; Bem is in a strange position as a professionally published and distributed 'zine that's edited and compiled as a hobby, and also probably America's lowest circulation "high-circulation" effort, and anybody adventurous enough to buy a copy has, doubtless, already bought all other glossy-covered publications in the store.

The very size of British fandom makes for a different sort of publication from the Journal and TCR, neither of which would do all that well with a print run of about 200 copies. A typical British fanzine has pages just under 6" wide by 8¼" high ("A5"), and only about 32 of them; the cover, like the interior pages, is black & white, on paper no better than the sheets inside.

I've three fanzines like that in front of me; I got more entertainment and more pleasure out of each one than out of the latest Comics Feature, so I've no hesitation in telling you about them.

BLACK AND WHITE ≠3 costs 50 pence in Britain--if you'd like a copy sent by air mail, I'd suggest putting two dollars in an envelope, plus a suitable request, and mailing them off to Daniel Slingsby.

For this trivial investment you'll get a 44-page magazine, with a wide selection of fan artwork (including Bem contributors Dave Harwood, Steve Lowther, and Pete Scott) illustrating articles on such very diverse subjects as war heroes The Losers (by Graeme Bassett), Bridwell creation The Seraph (by Howard Stangroom), and the DC lettercol answerers (by Dave Dursley)! The review section covers the recent Judge Dredd 2000AD serial, and also 'Mad Max 2' (alias 'The Road Warrior') and "When The Wind Blows" by Raymond Briggs, a chilling comics album depicting what happens to a middle-aged married couple after an atomic war. British fanzines are reviewed; there are columns on comics, by Andy Worthington, and self-indulgent writing, by Steve Green; and scattered in odd places are photographs and profiles of many of the contributors, and other well-known British comics fans.

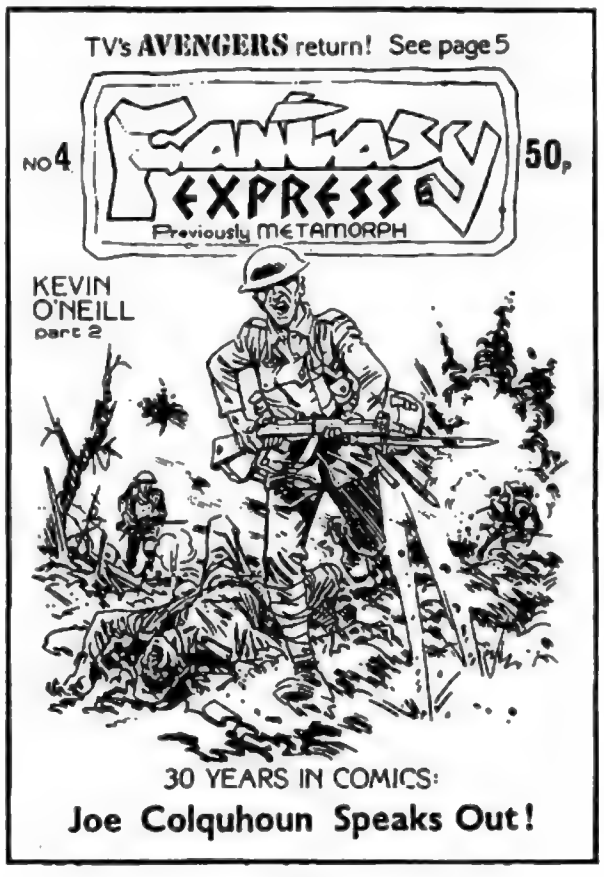
The centre-spread is fun; 31 different pictures of Colleen Wing, by almost every artist combination ever to draw her. It is amazing how much that girl can change between appearances -- while it would not be realistic to expect Larry Hama's version to be identical to Rudy Nebres', it's truly remarkable how her hair-style, eye-brows, and chin changed!

There's a meaty 16-page letters column, showing the enthusiastic support that this fanzine gets--it's similar to the lettercol in Bem-35. You may find it off-putting, but only the first time.

The same price information applies to the 36-page FANTASY EXPRESS ≠4, which comes from Lew Stringer.

The cover, by pro artist Joe Colquhoun, is on this page; he's interviewed inside, while the other main feature is the second half of an interview with 2000AD artist Kev O'Neill.

Fantasy Express is devoted to British comics, unlike most British fanzines which either mix American and British comics, or stick with good old Marvel and DC. Why, Joe Colquhoun isn't even a 2000AD artist -- as you'll know if you read the interview with Pat Mills in Bem-35, and saw the artwork on page 16, he's best known for a strip set in World War I. If you enjoy the British comics parts of Bem, you will find Fantasy Express an interesting read, and the two well-illustrated interviews here are ideal supplements to Bem-35's Pat Mills interview and "Making of Nemesis" feature. (Hmm -- I guess you could still obtain a copy of Bem-35 from New Media's Tampa address, if you missed it, come to that...)



Fantasy Express ≠4 also contains a couple of pages of news about British comics and their creators, an article on humour strip "Puss an' Boots", a few words from Pat Mills, and two of editor Lew's own "Brickman and Trowel" comedy strips. Very recommendable.

CYGNUS ALPHA ≠7 comes from Paul West, this time the £2.00, or 50p, brings you 28 pages, and a front cover by a less well-known comics professional, Ron Tiner, who for Paul had the extra attraction of living locally in Exeter--and yes, an interview with him is the main selling point of the issue. A less well-known interviewee doesn't mean that you'll get a less interesting interview; it is fascinating to get his view of the comics scene, and his more notorious co-workers.

Cygnus Alpha aims to cover a wider range of subject matter than solely comics, and is often the source of an interesting article on Doctor Who and the show's fandom. This time there are some photographs from the new series, and Graeme Bassett pops up again with a review of a Doctor Who Easter egg, as well as contributing an article on recent werewolf movies. The Doctor Who season is reviewed, there's a feature, with photographs, of the shooting of a new BBC version of "The Hound of the Baskervilles" starring ex-Doctor Who Tom Baker as Holmes...and there's even room for five pages of letters.

Three relatively new fanzines, each with its own individual approach and a totally distinctive editorial personality. Contributors, and readers, overlap -- but you'd never confuse one title for another. I hope that they all continue on their (reasonably) regular schedules; for me, they are what British comics fanzine fandom is all about.

Perceptive readers of "Fan-Things" in Bem-35 will have realized that it was not very up-to-the-minute. Due to New Media's spring hiatus, in fact, it was a good six months out of date. I hope that this time, I'm nearer to the publication date; it's late August as I write this, for what that's worth.

Assuming that such problems are soon overcome, be assured that this column will be glad to look at fanzines from the U.S.A., not to mention Australia, Canada, or anywhere else, come to that. And fanzines do come from many places: witness SARJAINFO ≠34, from Finland. It has 44 big pages, and a summary in English which unfortunately does not include a price.

-- worth risking an international reply coupon or two to find out!

Sarjeinfo #34 cover-features Prince Valiant, and includes, judging by the illustrations, quite a lot of material on the syndicated newspaper strips. An interview with Ursula Niemistö, who draws the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala, for the country's most widely circulated newspaper strip is also on show, and a review column even mentions BEM in passing, though what it says about us could be anything. Frustrating, eh?

Rather closer to home we have Fantasy Advertiser, a cover of which adorns this page. As it appears on a regular bi-monthly schedule, and is mainly a news-zine, there's no point in me reviewing a particular issue. Again, a couple of dollars is enough for a sample issue, sent to Martin Lock.

Comics news, American and British, is its main selling point, plus an sf section, fanzine reviews, a few columns, and letters. It's the top-circulation British fanzine at present, and, after a gap before its current editor took control, has just reached its 75th issue. (In Britain, if you haven't already discovered it, it costs 40p, or £2 for a five-issue subscription.)

WORLDS COLLIDE is another regular magazine, with 28 A4 (11¾" x 8¼") pages for 60p by mail, or maybe, with its extra weight, $3 by air, from Martin Skidmore.

Issue 4 features a lengthy article by Bem contributor Keith Williams on "Secrets of the Secret Six", mainly his shock revelations as to which of their number was Mockingbird, and also a 3-page interview with Bill Mantlo that makes interesting reading. Nice of Bill to take the time to do the interview--he did the same for Bem a few years ago, which I prefer of the two, because the questions were vaguer and fewer, and the answers were on the whole longer and also more detailed.

Also included: "Superwomen", a consideration of the rôle of the Marvel heroine in the 1980s by Dave Dursley; a call to boycott sub-standard comics in the hope that they'll improve; four columns; a three-page fantasy strip; reviews of fanzines and comics; and, finally, three pages of letters. I don't think it's the best issue yet of this fanzine, perhaps because the cover isn't as good as others they've had on previous issues, but I'm sure that by the time you send off your hard-earned dollars a new issue will have been published, so specify if you want 'WC' #4 or the latest number, I'd advise.

Back to Europe again, and a just-received copy of issue 44 of STRIPROFIEL. A four-issue subscription costs f35.00.

the cover price is f6.25 for 60 A4 pages.

The main feature is a look back at BABERIBA, a short-lived 1974 magazine; there's also an article on the Star Wars newspaper strip, one on a historical strip hero called "Jugurtha", listings of scheduled comics albums, and an 8-page strip by Don Lawrence, the artist of "Storm" & "The Trigan Empire". Of course, it is all in Dutch, which is a bit of a handicap for most of us...

Two more of the main British fanzines, briefly, are CEREBRO #15 is $3 by air or $2 by sea mail, or a 6-issue subscription is $16 or $10, from G.F. Willmetts,

for 48 A4 pages , "the X-Men Fan Clubzine" with lots of good X-related reading and the emphasis on two-way communication, and THE OWL'S EFFORT #17 would be another $2 worth I'd guess, from Richard Domar,

for 24 A6 pages. It's mainly a letters-zine, and the editor doesn't hesitate to insult writers he feels deserves it. An acquired taste perhaps, but I like it.

Before we end, though, let's look at a stripzine, FLICK #5, similarly priced for 16 large A4 pages from Eddie Campbell.

It's based on real life rather than on superheroes. Eddie, who was involved in Bem-35's main "HMS Conqueror" strip as scripter and penciller, drew the main strip, while Dave Harwood drew two single-pagers, Phil Elliott contributed a two-pager, and Brian Bolland is also on hand with some of his preliminary work for Camelot 3000 and two other illustrations. I liked it, and thought it was a rather successful compilation; Eddie in particular has vision and style, and deserves to go far.

There's more to the British scene than the fanzines that I have mentioned here, of course, and next time I may well be telling you about some other titles worth sending off for. I will also be glad to review American fanzines, so please send them to me.

They could end up being reviewed by my colleague Chris Padgett for Fantasy Advertiser too, if you can indicate a British price to us.

-ED SALLIS

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A CLAREMONT WOMAN?

A SHORT QUIZ

COMPILED BY

MARGARET O'CONNELL

1) Do you have frequent attacks of goddesshood? If you have a tendency to glow, produce spectacular electrical effects (bird-shaped or otherwise), and/or lose the pupils of your eyes when irritated, you may be in danger of becoming Too Cosmic For Your Own Good and destroying the universe (or at least the local property values). If you catch yourself making stilted Submariner-esque speeches that begin "Hear me, (fill in the name of the person who has jostled you on the bus or perpetrated some other trivial misdeed)," seek professional help at once. It may already be too late for anything but a complete psychic lobotomy, or a glorious self-sacrificing suicide, to be followed by an inspiring eulogy from that ever-popular intergalactic homilist, the Watcher.

2) If you are a supporting character, do you talk tough and have minor-league super-powers of your own, but persist in making misguided efforts to assist a much more powerful male friend by attempting to take on old super-villainous foes of his who are formidable enough to trash you with both hands tied behind their backs? (Please note that the delusory conviction that you, and only you, can defeat villains who have just vanquished several seasoned superheroes, even if you have to pull a machine-gun out of the pantry to do so, is essential equipment for any would-be Claremont woman.)

3) Are you a powerful sorceress who moonlights as an airline stewardess because, in fact, the only spell you know is one that gives short, adamantium-boned psychotics the appearance of death? (Please note: if you answered "yes" to this question, you may be ideally suited for a very exciting Hollywood career in the field of cosmetic special effects for horror films. Send for a free brochure from the Bad Karma School of Applied Sorcery for the Inept today. This offer is void where prohibited by the laws of magic.)

4) Are you a would-be Scarlet Witch clone gullible enough to be easily conned into believing that, despite the apparently exclusively pseudo-scientific basis of your actual or projected mutant powers (e.g. the ability to take showers without the benefit of plumbing, or to imitate your big brother's trick of turning his body to scrap metal), your true heritage lies in the oh-so-feminine discipline of sorcery?

5) If you are not a tough-talking would-be female deity, an inexplicably little-known sorceress with powers that equal or outclass those of Doctor Strange, or a superhero's girlfriend with delusions of grandeur, are you

a) a cloyingly cute teenybopper-cum-computer genius with terrible taste in costumes who alienates everyone not old enough to be your mother by claiming to understand Reed Richards' conversation and otherwise constantly reminding your associates of how smart you supposedly are (despite a total lack of supporting evidence), or
b) a stereotypically narcissistic and trivial-minded fashion model who demonstrates your creator's versatility in writing different kinds of female characters by complaining that your manicure is ruined after a superhero saves you from being crushed to death by several tons of falling masonry?

6) Do you emit melodramatically-worded thought balloons about your closer-than-sisters feelings toward other women, even those who are your rivals for your much-vaunted surrogate daughter's affections, but never become interested in anyone of the opposite sex unless he is hopelessly ineligible because

a) he has to go off and become King of the Wakandas and you have to keep a rendezvous with goddesshood in Kenya;
b) he is one of the most notorious supervillains in the Marvel universe and has an armour fetish;
c) he is a barbarian king with a habit of hijacking Terran superheroes to use as cannon fodder to provide light for his home world, an unprepossessing planet in another dimension which is continually at was and lacks even the most basic necessities for a stable civilization, such as a sun;
d) he is the conveniently-widowed father of your current adopted girl-child, but is unfortunately killed while gallantly attempting to defend you from your rapist demon lover before the end of the first story in which you appear?

(If your answer was d), you may be eligible for an exciting career in the Foxhunts-with-a-Human Quarry programme sponsored by the Council of Female Supremacist African Rulers of the Pseudo-Hyborian Age. Send all applications by Botched Spell Express to the Candace, Meroe, Somewhere in the Middle of Nowhere. Allow six to eight millenia for reply.)

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you are either in luck or doomed, depending on your point of view. Either way, you are destined for a future of undeservedly hogging the limelight, delivering egotistical monologues heavy-handedly explaining your muddled motivations to others, and plunging into implausibly intense meaningful relationships at first sight which develop almost entirely off-panel. In other words, you are a Claremont woman. -MARGARET O'CONNELL

Ladies' Night

LAMB'S 502 HAD BEEN COLONISED TWO CENTURIES AGO; AND NOW H.M.S. CONQUEROR HAD DROPPED BY TO SEE HOW THINGS WERE GOING, AND TO INVITE THE LOCALS TO JOIN THE COMMONWEALTH.

YES, A GENUINE HUMAN-COLONISED PLANET--BUT A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN 200 YEARS, SO WE ALL PITCHED IN TO SET UP THE SECURITY FENCE AS SOON AS THE DUST HAD SETTLED.

ML R.D.H '81

C.17

HOW CLOSE TO THE CITY ARE WE, LIEUTENANT?

TWELVE KILOMETRES, SIR. PRESIDENT GAINES SAID HE'D SEND A LIMOUSINE TO COLLECT YOU--IT SHOULD BE HERE VERY SOON NOW.

JENKINS

LUKE

FRANK

Ah, COMMODORE! I HOPE I HAVEN'T KEPT YOU.

NOT AT ALL, Dr. FYFE --JANET. WE'RE WAITING FOR THE PRESIDENT'S LIMOUSINE, WHICH WILL TAKE US TO THE GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS.

A SECURITY DETAIL WILL FOLLOW US IN OUR OWN TRANSPORT.

THAT'S UNDER YOUR COMMAND, LUKE? WHO ARE YOU BRINGING?

LUKE

JENKINS

FRANK'S DRIVING, DOCTOR. SERGEANT WILLIAMS IS PICKING OUT A COUPLE OF HIS BEST MARKSMEN; COTTS AND SHINER, I EXPECT.

I'M SURE THEY WON'T BE NEEDED.

1

EVERY TIME I HEAR OUR COMMODORE MAKE A HOPEFUL PREDICTION, I GET A MAD CRAVING TO BE SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY...

A-er-CAR IS APPROACHING THE BARRIER, SIR.

LET IT IN, THEN, GIRL. THIS WILL BE INTERESTING, OUR FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE LOCAL...

...technology...?

MORNING, FOLKS. I'M PRESIDENT GAINES. WHICH ONE OF YOU IS BROTHER JENKINS?

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY OUR VALIANT COMMODORE TAKES A RIDE WITH THE PRESIDENT OF A PLANET -- BUT SOMEHOW, THE CHEERS AND WHISTLES WITH WHICH THE CREW HAD WAVED THE "LIMOUSINE" FAREWELL HAD QUITE SPOILED HIS MOOD.

IT WAS..er..MOST KIND OF YOU TO MEET US YOURSELF, MR. PRESIDENT.

OH, I NEEDED THE AIR, AND MY GIRLS NEEDED THE EXERCISE, SIR! THEY GET FAT AND SASSY WITHOUT ENOUGH WORK.

IT WAS HARD TO KEEP THE BUGGY MOVING SLOWLY ENOUGH TO FOLLOW THE PEDAL-CART; BUT MY PASSENGERS WERE HAVING GREAT FUN SPECULATING WHAT SORT OF WHACKY PLANET THIS WAS.

TELL ME, BROTHER JENKINS--HOW GOES LIFE ON EARTH TODAY?

TOLERABLY WELL, MR. PRESIDENT. BUT WE'VE COME HERE TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR WORLD, TO BRING YOU INTO OUR FAMILY OF PLANETS...

IT TOOK US HALF AN HOUR TO REACH THE CITY; AND THE SIGHTS WERE EVEN WEIRDER THAN WE EXPECTED!

WE HAVE OXEN FOR HEAVY AGRICULTURAL DUTIES, BUT INSTEAD OF THE READY-FERTILISED HORSE OVA LISTED ON THE MANIFEST...

...THE COLONISER VESSEL LEFT US WITH TWO LARGE CRATES OF CHEWING GUM.

A MOST UNFORTUNATE ERROR.

IT WAS INDEED--BUT, DESPITE THIS PLANET BEING TOO YOUNG TO HAVE RESERVES OF PETROLEUM OR COAL, WE GET BY, AS YOU CAN SEE.

JENKINS

BUT IS IT ALWAYS WOMEN WHO PEDAL, MR. PRESIDENT?

WHY CERTAINLY, MY DEAR. YOUR SEX SEEMS TEMPERAMENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY BEST SUITED FOR SUCH JOBS, AS I'M SURE YOU'RE AWARE.

WHAT DO--

COME NOW, JANET. IF YOU'RE TO BE COMMONWEALTH AMBASSADOR HERE, YOU MUST FIT IN WITH LOCAL CUSTOMS.

THERE WAS SOME MIX-UP ON THE SUPPLY OF HISTORY TAPES, TOO, BROTHER JENKINS. DO YOU HAVE TAPES FROM 1870 A.D. TO THE PRESENT DAY ON YOUR VESSEL THAT WE CAN BORROW?

AHA! SO THAT WAS WHY THIS PLACE WAS SO STRANGE--FOR WHERE ARE WE WITHOUT HISTORY?

SO I SAT AT THE WHEEL, AND WONDERED HOW LONG BEFORE COTTS AND SHINER WOULD DECIDE TO FRATERNISE.

--MOST PRODUCTIVE, MR. PRESIDENT. THE EMBASSY IS THE NORMAL FIRST STEP, WITH ITS WORDLINK TO EARTH.

YES, INDEED. AND YOU'LL PROVIDE THOSE TAPES?

WE WILL, MR. PRESIDENT. VICTORIA HAS A LOT OF CATCHING UP TO DO, BUT I CAN ASSURE YOU IT WILL BE WORTH IT.

3

AND ON THAT NOTE, WE WAVED GOODBYE AND ROLLED OFF BACK TO THE CONQUEROR, WITH THE COMMODORE IN FINE SPIRITS.

EVERYTHING'S SORTED OUT IN RECORD TIME, JANET! CAINES WAS VERY EAGER FOR US TO OPEN AN EMBASSY HERE.

ALMOST TOO EAGER. COMMODORE, HIS EXPLANATION WAS TOO PAT--IT DIDN'T RING TRUE, AND THE *ATMOSPHERE* WAS ALL WRONG.

FEMALE INTUITION, Dr. FYFE?

IF YOU LIKE...

JENKINS

ME, I TENDED TO AGREE WITH Dr. FYFE; MAYBE COTTS AND SHINER HADN'T NOTICED, BUT THE GIRLS THEY'D TALKED TO HADN'T ACTED IN THE NORMAL WAY. I WISHED FL'FF WAS AVAILABLE--AS IT WAS, ONCE THE BUGGY WAS SAFELY STOWED, I SOUGHT OUT ENSIGN KATHLAR.

HAD A GOOD TRIP, FRANK?

NOT BAD, MY DEAR--BUT THE SET-UP'S ALL WRONG, WE OUGHT TO DO SOME INVESTIGATING. FOR A HUMAN-COLONISED PLANET, IT JUST DOESN'T *FEEL* RIGHT.

FRANK

YOU FELT IT TOO, FRANK? WELL, I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURITY DURING THE SETTING-UP OF OUR EMBASSY, AND I SAY THAT A LITTLE QUIET RESEARCH IS NEEDED.

SPYING, YOU MEAN?

EXACTLY. AND, PEOPLE, ONCE IT GETS DARK, TWO OF OUR MERRY BAND ARE GOING TO MAKE LIKE JAMES BOND!

AND SINCE THEY'VE SEEN FRANK AND ME, IT'S A REQUISITION FOR TWO LADIES' BICYCLES I'M GIVING THE QUARTERMASTER!

HEY, HOLD ON A MOMENT, BUSTER--

4

"WHAT ARE WE GOING TO WEAR?"

KATH, LET'S LEAVE THE BICYCLES HERE, AND GO ON ON FOOT.

SUITS ME, NETTE. WE'RE NEAR THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE NOW, AND THAT'S THE PLACE TO START.

Hmm, I THINK WE'D BETTER TRY THE BACK DOOR, NETTE.

GOOD THINKING, BOSS!

AND, BY CUTTING THROUGH THE GARDEN, THE GIRLS GOT TO THE BACK OF THE OFFICES WITHOUT INCIDENT.

HOW'S IT GOING?

IT'S MOVING. WE'LL SOON GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THINGS NOW!

THIS LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE'S PRIVATE OFFICE. I HOPE HE DOESN'T LOCK HIS FILES.

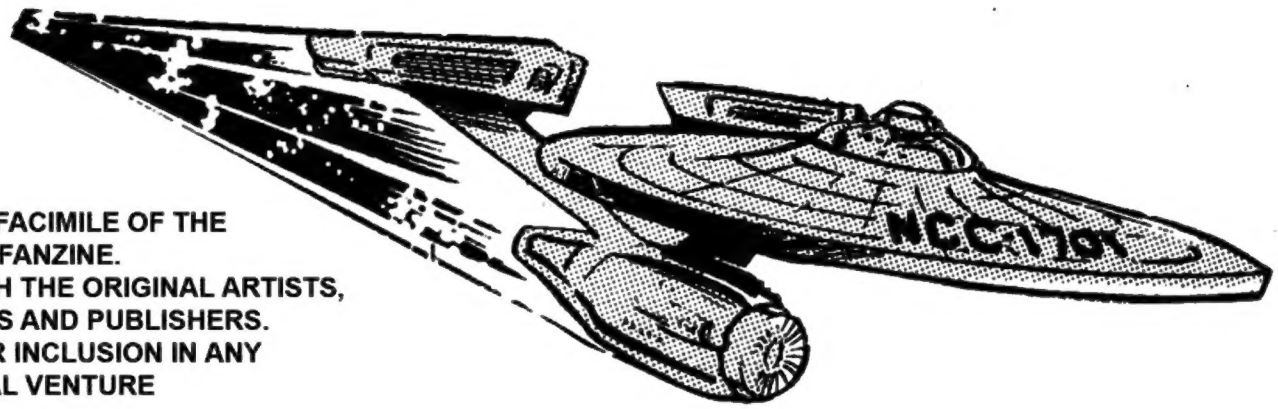
I DON'T THINK WE NEED TO RANSACK THE PLACE, KATH. JUST SHINE YOUR TORCH ON THE PAINTING OVER THERE.

WHAT IS IT?

IT'S A *VERON!* KATHLAR, WE AREN'T THE FIRST SHIP TO VISIT THE COLONISTS HERE --AND WHEN THE VERONS COME VISITING, THEY STAY!

THEY DO, INDEED; AND, AS OUR MAIN ENEMIES IN THE SECTOR, THEY CONQUER AND ENSLAVE. THIS WAS NO PLACE FOR THE CONQUEROR TO BE--THIS WHOLE WORLD WAS A TRAP!

AND THAT WASN'T SOMETHING IT TOOK US TWO MONTHS TO FIND OUT...



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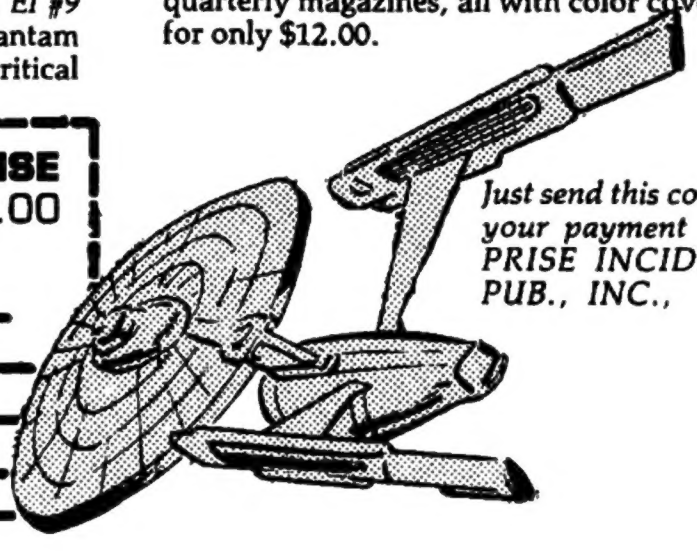

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REACTION -- continued from page 22...

noticeable in most of Mills' and Wagner's work happened to coincide with the sense of humour the programme itself had adopted thanks, or no thanks, to Tom Baker. In that respect, at that time, Mills and Wagner were exactly the right choice of people to give the Doctor Who strip to. Indeed, these two men often showed what a ghastly monster humour in Doctor Who could be--take, for example, the sequence in the story "The Iron Legion" where the Doctor defeats the Ecto-slime; in that one scene Mills and Wagner, probably inadvertently, summed up the character of The Doctor, whilst Tom Baker was in the rôle, precisely...a clown in the face of adversity. Steve Parkhouse's more serious approach to the strip is clearly, now, best suited to the Peter Davison interpretation of the Doctor--a man of some mystery who stumbles into adventurous situations rather than goes looking for them; an alien who confesses to a certain predilection for planet Earth. Indeed, Parkhouse's creation of a home-from-home for the Doctor (Stockbridge) invokes, in me, fond memories of the old Doctor Who strips in COUNTDOWN (back in them ther' days when Jon Pertwee played the Doctor), where the Doctor was often seen to operate from a cottage in the country. And thank goodness Steve Parkhouse hasn't felt the need for a comic-strip companion for the Doctor--I can't agree with Mike that the Doctor in the Monthly should have to suffer all the obligatory "Why"s, "What"s and "What happens when I press this button"s that the Doctor has to suffer in the TV series. Thought balloons and panel captions are far less tiring for both reader and writer and give the stories a pace that would be missing if the Doctor had to stop and explain the plot to companions all the time. After all, can Mike cite me an instance in the early Marvel Doctor Who strips where Sharon (a token if I ever saw one) was actually of any benefit to the plot of a story, and couldn't have been dropped in favour of a thought balloon? And, anyway, why am I writing a letter about Doctor Who to a comics fanzine?

Frank Plowright I was rather amused at your minor concessions to the American distribution, most particularly the addition of England or Scotland to every address in Reaction. I still wonder, though, how the American audience will take to Bem. Attempting to look at issue 35 from an outsider's point of view, it did seem a very incestuous fanzine -- a direct result of the relatively small size of British comics fandom. I also wonder whether the American interest in British comics anywhere near approaches the fanatical devotion held for the American product by British fans.

ART CREDITS

Tom Abell: 52; Leigh Baulch: 18, 39, 40; Laurence Bowkett: 60 (pencils); Pat Boyette: 37, 38; Mark Casto: 67; Hon Fai Chan: 66; Mark Farmer: 28, 31, 32, 60 (inks); Martin S. Forrest: 53 (right); Steve Gibson: 5; Dave Harwood: 11, 23-27 (letters), 54-58; Fred Himes: 37; Kev Hopgood: 14; Alan Hunter: 63; Rob MacGillivray: 45; Nick Neocleous: 53 (left); Russ Nicholson: 44; Luke Rainford: 34 (collage); Arthur Ranson: 33; Cliff Robinson: 9; Pete Scott: 8, 48; Cameron Smith: 7, 47, 51; Superswipe: 61; Bryan Talbot: cover, including colour separations; Don Wazejewski: 2; Colin Wilson: 49; David M. Windett: 30; Dave Wishart: 6, 10.

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Katholicity was great. Well done Kath and Robin. I laughed all evening at the Bizarro Dracula. I hope it's been noticed that a Bizarro Ka-Zar has run for 23 issues of his own title, and a Bizarro Magneto appeared in X-Men 150. You also forgot to mention the Bizarro Starfire, who has yet to learn English because she's too shy to make the necessary physical contact; the Bizarro Watcher, who's only 18 inches tall and myopic, and the Bizarro Moondragon, who is a long-haired old woman who rarely leaves her house, believing she is not worthy enough to mix with humanity. Has Kath ever explained why Katholicity was chosen as her column title? The pun is obvious, but impartiality has never been one of the primary concerns of the column, thank God. /(Bem-13's first episode began "So here I am, all of a sudden, with a column of my own. I never asked if I could write a column; Martin never asked if I could write a column either, just told me to think of a title or he'd get Nige Edwards to do it. Hastily, I thought of a title. The word 'catholicity' means a broad view of a subject; spelt with a K, it means a broad's view..." Not a mention of impartiality in sight, is there? -Martin)/

The price of British fanzines with airmail postage on really does seem prohibitive. If an American fan reading Fan-Things has the choice of going into his local comic shop and spending $1.95 on Amazing Heroes or sending away the same amount for a copy of Cerebro or The Owl's Effort, it hardly seems a choice at all. I'd be interested to hear whether zine editors were deluged with orders as a result of this column. I doubt it. I feel that you could do more of a service to British fandom by concentrating on proper reviews of fanzines, rather than just listing contents. If necessary, only review two or three fanzines each time, alternating those to be reviewed, and perhaps dealing with more than one issue at a time. American fans are more likely to be tempted into shelling out $2 if they have a better idea of what's in a zine. I also think that you might stress the quality of British fan art in general. I think it's a lot better than most of the stuff appearing in the American zines.

The Pat Mills interview was fascinating. I only wish I'd read parts of it before writing the 2000AD article. Also very interesting was the reproduced comic script and artwork. It explained far more than the recent series of articles in Comics Scene, in around a quarter of the number of pages they used.

EDITORIAL -- continued from page 66 ..

#34 that we'd welcome outside contributions to the HMS Conqueror "mythos", be they plot suggestions, scripts, or, as in this case, a complete story. This offer still stands.

There was, apparently, a hitch on the sending out of complimentary copies last time. Our apologies if anyone has ended up without their usual copy; I hope that you are all safely back with us now.

I've no space left to thank people like Steve McManus and Richard Burton of 2000AD, cover artist Bryan Talbot, and others properly for their assistance, but be assured Bem wouldn't be the same without them. Next issue should star an interview with Brian Bolland, an article on European comics creator Hugo Pratt, a feature on 2000AD series "The Meltdown Man", reviews, letters, two more HMS Conqueror strips--plenty of good reasons to subscribe, I'd say! -Martin Lock

OUT OF WORK ? WHY NOT TAKE A VISIT TO THE...

ROBOT FACTORY

CLUNK ZZZ BR RRRTT TING

OOOH!

TWIDDLE

OW OW OW

OUT

REJECT

AAHH.

ZZZ WHIRRR

CRASH!

OH NO...

DEPARTMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT

BOX 1.

WHAT'S IT ALL MEAN, HEY!

CASTRO

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